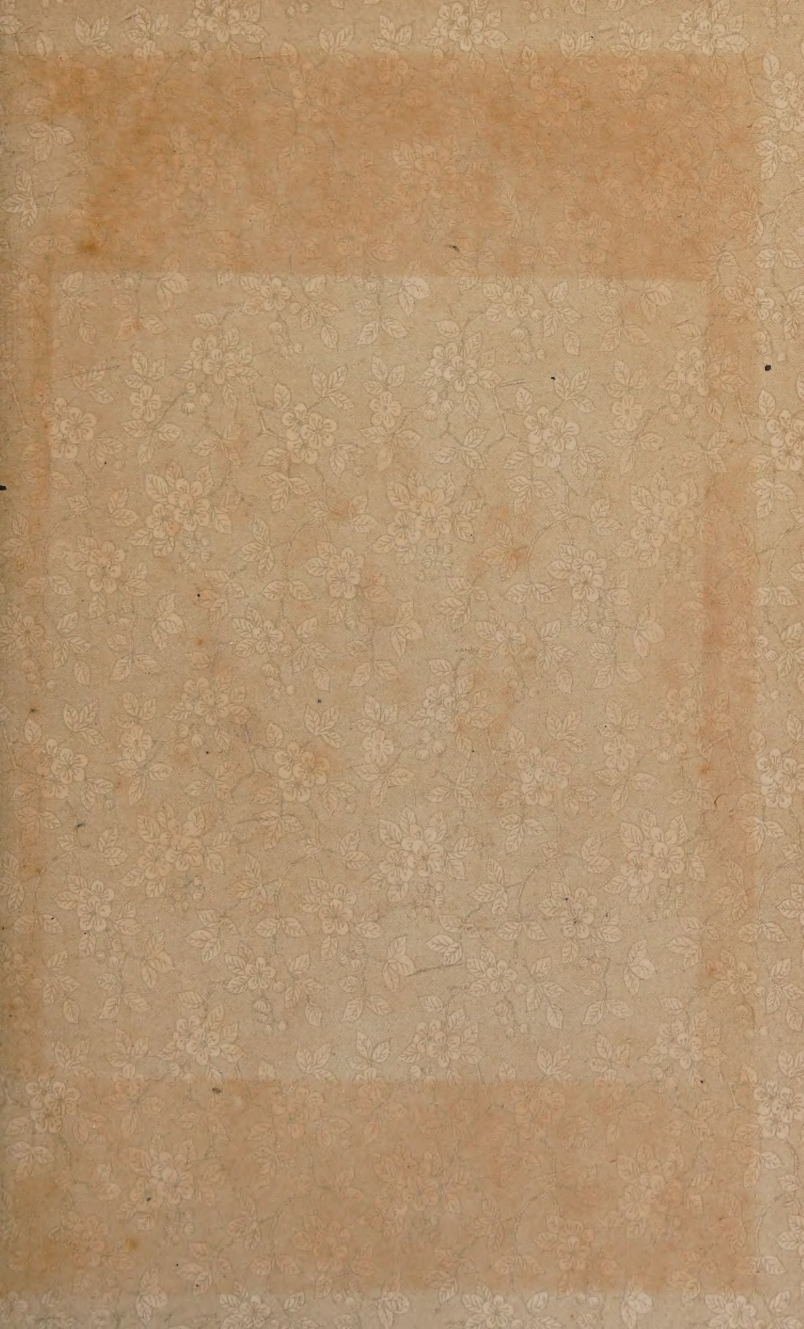


THE WOMEN
OF
SACRED HISTORY.

BY A. S.





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Women of
Sacred History



Women of Sacred History

A SERIES OF LESSONS GIVEN
TO YOUNG WOMEN

By
A. S.

With a Preface by

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Preface.

THE following lessons on the Women of Sacred History need little in the way of introduction from me. They are the work of a lady who has had experience in taking classes of young women—those, for the most part, whose lives have been set in rough and difficult surroundings. The book will, I think, have a special value in suggesting lines of teaching to many women who, through the agency of the Girls' Friendly Society and in other ways, are striving to train girls in the principles of Christian womanhood. Mothers, too, will find in it guidance for that most sacred duty from which no school teaching can altogether dispense them—the home Bible-reading with their own growing children.

Some of the lessons, as will be seen, treat difficult moral subjects with great plainness and courage. But the treatment is so delicate withal, and so linked on to the Bible record and the loftiest doctrines of the Catholic Faith that, in the hands of a wise teacher, such lessons ought to be full of wholesome inspiration.

The writer has not attempted to give to these studies any literary finish, but has deliberately preserved the free and sometimes colloquial character of the notes used in her *viva-voce* teaching. She sends them out, I know, with the simplest desire that they may by God's blessing lead some of His children to think on things pure and lovely and of good report, and to do these things.

F. E. CARTER.

The Precincts, Canterbury,

July, 1898.

TO
E. M. M.,
WHOSE FRIENDSHIP AND AID
ENABLED ME TO WRITE
THESE STUDIES.

A. S.

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Women of Sacred History.

Eve (1).

Read Genesis ii. 18-26.



TO-DAY we begin to study and think about a subject which touches us all—*Womanhood*. Our lesson book will be the Bible; therefore we may reverently say our Master and Teacher is God.

God has deigned to tell us, at the very beginning of the Bible, the great purpose of *Womanhood*. God says, "It is not good for man to be alone; I will make him a help meet for him" (Gen. ii. 18). I will make for him a nature that will fit his nature, a nature that shall draw out his nature by supplying fresh powers, or by giving full meaning to those he has.

We must remember God *had* given to man the animal world, the companionship of the animal

nature. "He brought him every beast of the field and every fowl of the air" (verse 19). But let us never forget that of the animal world, the animal nature, it was said, "But for Adam there was not found an help meet for him" (verse 20). No, it was impossible, for man was created in the "Image of God, after His Likeness" (Gen. i. 26). "The Spirit of God had made him, and the Breath of the Almighty had given him life" (Job xxxiii. 4). How could the animal world awaken, or share, the realization of these mighty gifts?

And so we reach the purpose of womanhood. The woman and the man together share "progress, man's distinctive mark alone, not God's, and not the beast's." Man is no longer "alone." There was one who shared with him the yearnings Godward. To both there came not only the senses of the material life—of touch, of sight, of sound, of smell, of taste—but above and beyond all this there was the union of spirit; there was the knowledge of a spiritual nature; both knew all it meant to the other when, in the cool of the evening, "they heard the Voice of God walking in the garden" (chap. iii. 8).

Eve, the gift of God, built by God of human flesh, which God took from man. This bride, adorned for her husband with her gifts of womanhood, would

seem to us, as we think of her, almost as a Sacrament. As she stood on that fair day, and Adam looked upon her, was she not to him the outward sign of the Love of God? Can it not be so still? Cannot the holy union of man and woman be a Sacrament? Cannot the husband sacredly receive the bride given to him as a gift from their Heavenly Father? Yes, Holy Matrimony is a Sacrament. God still joins man and woman together. He is still with His Church. Marriage is indeed a holy estate; and what God has joined together no man can put asunder.

The purposes of God are sure. His purpose, when He gave this gift to man, what was it? Was it not this, that woman should share the deep meanings of humanity with man, that she should be his complement, that together they should reveal and realize their heritage, "the Image of God, after His Likeness"? Let us never forget that for a while this first woman *did* this, that before the Fall the help meet was found for Adam (verses 23-25). "They were heirs together of the grace of life" (1 S. Peter iii. 7).

And for ourselves. God has made us women. Should we, if we were married, be to an husband as a gift "from the Lord"? (Prov. xix. 14). Would

the man who chose you have chosen indeed a "good thing"? (Prov. xviii. 22).

Do I ever think of the reason of my existence? How do I now help man, humanity? What about my brother, the young man I know, what do I appeal to in their nature? Is there that in me that awakens that fragment of the Image of God, Purity? When they are with me, do pure things, lovely things, things of good report, seem the most beautiful? Is it reverent love, or base passion, that I wake up in that young man who wishes to marry me? Have I ever claimed my heritage? Do I remember that I may gather up all my powers (if I am beautiful, if I am attractive, if I have womanly influence), and write "God's gift" across them all? Do I use them all for the purpose for which they were given me? Am I a help "meet for," "answering to" (R.V. marg.), beings created after God's likeness?

But some will say, "All cannot be wives." Yes, this is true. But all can be true women in God's world. God purposed that woman should help man in the world. He plainly showed that without woman there was a want, a void. Think then, there is no work I do, there is no position I fill, but that there my woman's nature is needed. Needed as a

daughter, sister, lover, or friend. Then looking out into the world, it is needed as nurse, servant, shop assistant, clerk, factory hand ; yes, in all the countless duties and callings women are needed, and there they can fulfil the purpose of God.

Ge (2).

Read Genesis iii.



OD tells us in this story how sin entered into human nature; and we may be quite sure it is the very best way of telling it. The serpent—does it not tell us of the gliding, noiseless, slippery, coiling, insinuating character of the Devil? The picking the forbidden fruit—does it not point, by its own seeming insignificance, to the true seat of sin—the will?

But, for us to-day, the sad truth we have to learn is this—the first sin came into human life through a woman. Yes, she who should have been the Mother of a holy race, brought forth sin. The whole story seems to be summed up in these words, written centuries after, “when lust,” uncontrolled desire, “hath conceived it bringeth forth sin” (S. James i. 15); “and when the woman saw that the tree was good for food and that

it was pleasant to the eyes, a tree to be *desired* to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof and did eat, and gave unto her husband with her, and he did eat " (verse 6). " And sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death "—" dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return " (verse 19).

What is sin? Sin is the severing of the human will from the known will of God. Sin is the misuse of our heritage—this is our heritage, that we are the workmanship of God; and sin is the misapplying that handiwork and using it for what it was never meant to be used. " God has made us and not we ourselves "; " we are His people."

Let us women try and see what made Eve sin. It was not the serpent; he only presented the sin, and attacked the citadel. It was not from stress of circumstances; Eve owned this herself (verse 2). No, it came in through the door of (1) *woman's inquisitiveness*—" A tree to be desired to make one wise." (2) It came in through the door of woman's love of pleasant things—good for food—pleasant to the eyes; Eve " followed too much the devices and desires of her own heart "—desire grew into lust—lust brought forth sin.

And what followed—what follows now? She drew Adam into sin. *She did not sin alone.* No need for

Satan to do active work here ; he knew what the influence of a woman, a wife, could be. What dread result followed ? Eve gained the knowledge she craved for—both man and wife *learnt to know evil*. Good—"God"—*they had known*. The desire fulfilled *was the knowledge of evil*.

How can I believe this, some will say ? How could eating a fruit reveal the knowledge of evil ? Eve knew evil because *she did it*. The revolt of the human will—it mattered not how that revolt was expressed—this it was that put the whole of human nature out of gear. If the will failed to act in this point, what force had it to keep any part in its true relation ? Man's harmonious nature became disjointed. The will, obedient to the purpose of God, had kept all bound together in their true place ; but now each voice was heard clamouring for satisfaction. Until then Adam and Eve's bodily nature had been in subjection to their spiritual nature ; but now they found the disjointed bodily nature making itself felt ; and oh, the shame of that moment—who can express the shrinking misery, the awful contrast between the freedom of the service of God in the past, and the degraded soul of man, no longer at unity with God, or his own nature ? Vainly he tried to forget God's Presence. "Adam, where art thou ?" came to his

ears—in mercy it came. Yes, where *was* Adam? Where *was* Eve? Where was the Adam of a few hours back? Where was the Eve—the help found for man? where were they? Gone, gone. This man, who cannot look up—this shrinking woman—who are they? They are in a lovely garden—the flowers still are beautiful—the cool of the evening has come—God is calling them. What is wrong? *All is wrong*. Their whole nature is wrong, and they can never put it right.

And for ourselves, do we try to learn evil? What is that we are listening to? that whisper that cannot be said aloud? What is that we are looking at? that horrid picture? that impure book? that expression? that sign? Where is our inquisitiveness taking us? Do you know we can never unlearn evil? We are not the same after we have deliberately learnt it—learnt it by experiencing it. By yielding our will to it, we lose our better selves. Where are we? we have lost the purpose of our being. “Our wills are ours *to make them Thine*.”

And is there no way back? Is there no power to bring back and reset the dislocated will? Yes, God has made a way. I can but name it to-day; some day we may learn more about it. The way is the Cross of Jesus. There, in that dread act of sacrifice,

the strength of God's Love and sin were tried, "and victory remained with Love. Jesus our Love was crucified." Then came true the promise given in this hour of desolation, "The seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent's head" (Gen. iii. 15).

Sarah the Princess, the Mother of Nations.

Read Genesis xvii. 15-21.



TO-DAY we think of one of the greatest women in the Old Testament history—Sarah. Her name is almost a household word to her descendants to this day. And they have reason to honour her name—a name given her by God. He changed it from Sarai to Sarah—Princess—an honour put upon few. We think of Abraham, Jacob, S. Peter, S. Paul, with their changed names.

How shall we think of her? What shall we specially remember about Sarah? Shall we think of her as a lovely, beautiful Princess? It sounds very attractive and romantic. Yes, Sarah was beautiful (Gen. xii. 11). Most women covet this gift; it seems to them to make life much easier. Was it for her *beauty* Sarah was celebrated when hundreds of years afterwards one of her descendants spake as he was moved by the Holy Ghost? (1 S. Peter iii. 4-6). Sarah's beauty brought her great temptation

—temptation to which she yielded ; and her beautiful face had to be filled with shame when she heard Abimelech's righteous words (Gen. xx. 16). Then, too, there came a time when beauty failed her—a time when her husband stood beside that beautiful form and asked leave to “bury his dead out of his sight” (Gen. xxiii. 1-4). If we learn nothing else, let us gather up this first lesson from Sarah—“Favour is deceitful and beauty is vain, but a woman that feareth the Lord she shall be praised” (Prov. xxxi. 30).

Shall we think of Sarah as *rich* ? Her husband was a rich man—“very rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold” (Gen. xiii. 2). Was it for her riches that Sarah was celebrated ? She was rich, and yet no money in the world could make her rich in the love of children. How often, when she looked upon the growing multitude of cattle, and saw the young lambs running to the quiet ewes, those riches must have seemed to her poor and unsatisfying.

Then, shall we think of Sarah as a *mistress* ? Think what power was in her hands—how many another's life was entirely controlled by Sarah. Think of her handmaid Hagar—her mistress could decide whom she should marry ; and what a strained relationship grew up between the free woman and

her bondswoman (Gen. xvi. 3; xxi. 10). Ah, as a mistress using her full rights, thinking of *them*—not of Hagar's rights—Sarah is not to be praised.

Shall we think of Sarah as a *wife*? The help meet for the "Friend of God" (2 Chron. xx. 7; S. James ii. 23). What a married life that must have been! So one was she with Abraham, so truly were they matched, that here, in her married life, we find one of the special reasons for which she should be had in remembrance—she is spoken of as *an ideal wife*, for she understood what obedience really means—service born of love. She the *free woman*, not Abraham's slave, as so many women are to their husbands, through weakness or cowardice or sloth. Sarah the free woman "*obeyed* Abraham, calling him lord" (1 S. Peter iii. 6). Blessed marriage bond, when as a type of the bond between man and his God, it too can prove that "service is perfect freedom."

And lastly, shall we think of Sarah as a *mother*? What a long preparation and discipline came before that motherhood. Of what is it ever the outward sign? The Victory of Faith. "Through Faith," we are told. At first, she "laughed." It seemed too good to be true; but afterwards, "through faith," "Sarah herself received strength to conceive seed"

(Heb. xi. 11). Sarah, like her husband, "staggered not at the promise of God." In her supernatural motherhood she foreshadowed another Mother, of whom it was said, "Blessed is she that believed, for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her by the Lord." We thought just now of the poverty of earthly riches; now we are thinking of a marvellous treasure, a mighty force—*Faith*. Sarah, through the ages, speaks to us of this. She shows us what it means to be "Rich in *Faith*" (S. James ii. 5).

What lessons can we gather for ourselves? Are they not these—Faith and Obedience? None of us will become "beautiful princesses." We may never be rich, or mistresses of large households, or have much power. But God may call many of you to be wives and mothers. Think of it. You may become a household word to your descendants—"Her children arise up and call her blessed" (Prov. xxxi. 28). You may leave such a legacy behind you as Sarah left—*Faith* towards God—in the wonderful moment when as a mother you are a worker with God. The *free obedience* of a wife, when you choose for your mate one whom, before all the world, you are proud to own as "lord."

Hagar, the Bondservant.

Read Genesis xvi. ; xxi. 8-21 ; Galatians iv. 22.

IT is difficult for us to understand the life of a bondservant. Hagar, with all her individuality—just as much as you and I have—was entirely in the power of her owners ; her own power of choice was almost taken from her. She had no power to alter, or to question, the circumstances of her life. Not even as to the subject of her marriage was she free, neither as a mother was she free ; she had no possessions of her own ; her clothes, her jewels, her very self, were the property of another—her master.

Then there came a time when the unused, and therefore untrained, will rose within her ; it seemed to whisper of a time when it could be free. “ I, not Sarah,” she thought, “ will be the mother of Abraham’s heir. What a position that will be, for I shall some day be the chief woman in this family.” She almost felt the freedom of her life ; there was some-

thing in her manner, her eye, that told Sarah this. And then came restraint, "and hard dealing." The untrained will had awaked—Hagar fled. She, the slave, escaped; she followed her impulse, she ran away from all that controlled her life, from the hard treatment, she "fled from the face" of Sarah. And now I can hear someone say, "Quite right, too; why should she be put upon?" Do you think Hagar alone, away from her service and hardships, was free—a really free woman? Do you know Hagar learnt a deeper lesson in that wilderness? She learnt of Another Presence, that she could not ever flee away from. She heard Another Voice, and learnt to know of other commands than the commands of man. "Thou, *God*, seest me." That was the Presence. "God had looked upon her." The eyes of this maidservant that had looked unto the hand of her mistress now waited upon the Lord her God until He had mercy upon her (Psalm cxxiii. 2). For she said, "Have I also here looked after Him that seeth me?" (Gen. xvi. 13). What an hour that was for Hagar! What did she not learn! How her nature must have grown and expanded in that hour of intercourse when the Angel of God's Presence found her a lonely wanderer!

Shall we think of what she learnt? Never to be

lonely again—"Thou, God, seest *me*." God's pledge to help her, *Ishmael*, how sweet that name must have been, even before her baby lay upon her breast, and clung with its tiny hands to her human strength—Ishmael—"God shall hear." And yet a more wonderful lesson Hagar was to learn. A new light flooded her life, and all the bondage of the past. Bondslave!—when it was God Who said, "Return to thy mistress, and submit thyself under her hand"? Why, her place, her position, her "situation," as we call it, was found for her by God. He knew about all the "hard dealing," and the details of the daily life of a bondservant; and of these common things He said, "This is the way, walk ye in it." This is how God heard. He did not send an angel to tell the mistress she was wrong, yet He heard and answered Hagar's need. God took the sting out of Hagar's trouble. Yes, He gave her back her trouble with a glory in it: *He* was in it. Those obedient feet of Hagar, as they retraced their steps along the way of the wilderness, were carrying back a human being, no longer a slave, as we count slaves, but *free*, free in the service of Him Whose service is perfect freedom. And yet once again Hagar met with God in the wilderness. God had let her go there yet again. She seems almost to have forgotten

the old promise and pledge, "God shall hear" (chap. xxi. 12). But God did not forget. He heard, not her voice, but the voice of her child, and Ishmael became a double pledge—"God shall hear."

And are these true for us, these two great lessons—"Thou, God, seest me"—"God shall hear"? Yes, quite true. What does God see when He sees me? What about my will, my heart? How am I looking upon my life? Is it common, everyday work? Is there hard dealing? What does God hear—when I am quite alone, and have quiet for prayer—when it is dark, and still, and hushed, like the wilderness—what does God hear? Does He hear, "Teach me Thy way, O Lord, shew me Thy path"?

Lot's Wife—Falling from Grace.

Read Genesis xix. 15-26.



OUR Lord tells us to remember her (S. Luke xvii. 32).

We do not know her name, we only know she was the wife of "just Lot." She, with her husband and children, was in great danger, and she was delivered from that danger. God drew near to her. God's angel took her by the hand; it seems almost as if he dragged her away (verse 16).

Her body left the evil place, and perhaps for awhile her spirit willed to leave it too; but in her heart the love for it was stronger. Those were not willing feet that took her away. No, she seemed to lag behind her husband. Her mind was not obedient to the heavenly word, "Escape for thy life, look not behind thee." The sun was rising upon the little city God had spared for them as a place of refuge; but Lot's wife had no eyes for the sun (verse 23). Her eyes must be turned towards the lurid, smoke-

covered plain. She looked back from behind her husband, and some of the driving cloud of sulphur and sand that was falling over those cities overtook her, and she was fixed where she stood. She had not wished truly to go on. She had her desire ; she never moved again. She remained ; and as we think of that silent figure, we think of the words, " Where your treasure is there will your heart be also " ; " No man having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of Heaven " (S. Matt. vi. 21 ; S. Luke ix. 62).

Does it seem a hard lesson for us ? Does God seem cruel ? Could He not have forced Lot's wife to enter Zoar ? No, God cannot deny Himself. He created man in His own image, and man became a living soul ; which means that man is not a machine, a chattel, to be carried merely by the maker's will. With Lot's wife it was not that the " spirit was willing and the flesh weak." How eagerly would she not have laid hold of the angel's strong and powerful hand, if this were so. No, it was her spirit that was *unwilling*. Who can tell, in the awful stillness, as she slowly passed from life, what lessons she may not have begun to learn ? God knows. Abraham had said of this very work of God, " Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right ? " (Gen. xviii. 25).

You and I, like Lot's wife, have made a start. We have been baptized. We have been brought out of the kingdom of darkness and sin. Are we "walking as children of the Light," with our faces towards the dawn? (Eph. v. 8). Do you know that in the ancient form of Baptism the Catechumen was turned from west to east (Col. i. 13). We have promised to renounce the devil and all his works, the pomps and vanities of this wicked world, and all the sinful lusts of the flesh. God has come very near to us; He has not only taken us by the hand, but put His Spirit within us (S. John iii. 5). Are we grieving, quenching that Blessed Spirit? (Eph. iv. 30; 1 Thess. v. 19). Where are our hearts? Where have we set our affections? On what are our wills bent? "Remember Lot's wife." Remember there is only one safe way of fleeing from evil—to turn our back upon it, and to walk with God. "Walk humbly with thy God" (Micah vi. 8).

Rebekah (1).

Read Genesis xxiv.



HAT a delightful story, this first story is, about Rebekah. It is all so natural. How often she had gone to draw the water for the household life. We can see her coming along the pathway this particular evening—this beautiful girl (see verse 16). How little she knew whither that way was leading her. She knew not of the quiet stranger and his prayer. Yet before that prayer was finished she had come within its influence. Long before that day Rebekah had no doubt learnt to be courteous and considerate, so that on this particular day it was quite natural for her to say so willingly, “Drink, my lord”; quite natural that the second thought should follow, “I will draw water for thy camels also” (verses 18, 19). And yet upon those small courtesies hung the destiny of her life.

What a wonderful insight we have here into the

ways of God. We see how God's Providence is the very reverse of chance, luck, fate. By this story we are allowed to see how God works. We get a glimpse of that working together of all things for good, mentioned in Rom. viii. 28. We are allowed to see how the plans of a loving Father for His children can be carried out. It was God's will that Rebekah should be Isaac's wife. He had "appointed" it (verse 14). It was Rebekah's free will to go that morning to the well, and it was her plain, common duty. It was her own wish to speak courteously, and it, too, was her duty. Both these simple things were *right*, they were pleasing to God, they were perfectly at one with His Will, His Mind, and so the two wills met, the plans of a loving Father were fulfilled for His child. And we see that it is along the homely path of *duty* that God can meet us and fulfil all His good pleasure concerning us.

It is so natural to wish to be married, all girls have their day dreams. Do you think this, or any other good thing, comes to you by "luck," "chance," "fate"? Are you scheming, neglecting duty to plan your own lives, trying to meet some particular person when you ought to be at home, trying to bring yourself under his notice when you ought to be with your sick brother or sister? What are you doing?

You are taking *yourself* as a guide for your future. You are taking your life and wishing to shape it without God. It seems the quickest, the most certain, in your feverish hurry. It is really letting your boat move at the mercy of the winds and tides, disregarding all rules of compass, or of helmsman, and so you drift and drift on to the rocks and quicksands, and your life is wrecked. How different was it with Rebekah. She, simply following her very homely path of duty, became the mother of a great nation, the ancestress of Christ. It is true to-day. God will shape your life. Keep near to Him. Let His Voice, speaking in your conscience, lead you, and some day, when you look back upon your life, instead of a wrecked life, this is what you will say, "Surely goodness and mercy have followed me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the House of the Lord for ever" (Psalm xxiii. 6).

But one other lesson comes to us in this story, we get an insight into the *mystery of Prayer*. Eleazar's prayer—what place had it in God's providence, in His plan? In this prayer—in all prayer—what have we? Is it man persuading an unwilling God? Is it a brother, loving, caring, more than the Father? Is it not, as it was in this case, the Hand of God and the hand of man moving to one aim? Eleazar

and God are at one for Isaac. Is this what prayer means? Yes, prayer, true prayer, that can be offered before God, "for Jesus Christ's sake," be it what it may, in its simplest form, "asking for something," or in its wider form, communion held by the soul with God—prayer *is ever* a blending of the human will with the Divine Will. Think of the providence at work for Isaac and Rebekah. All the happiness that came into their lives came to them, not only through the love of a Heavenly Father, it came also through the faithful love of a faithful servant. Do you think Eleazar felt the uselessness of prayer, when he "told Isaac all things he had done," and when "Isaac brought Rebekah into his mother Sarah's tent, and took her and she became his wife, and he loved her, and Isaac was comforted after his mother's death"? (verses 66, 67.)

Rebekah (2).

Read Genesis xxvii.

IN this story to-day we have a sad change from our lesson last Sunday. We can no longer think of Rebekah following the simple plain path of duty, but we see the workings of deceit within her mind; so that she shrank not from doing evil that good might come.

We must remember that God had told Rebekah before her children were born "that the elder would serve the younger" (chap. xxv. 23). With this thought before her, she excused herself in acting a lie. She knew Isaac was doing wrong in putting Esau first, and so she allowed herself to do wrong also. How? It was no spoken lie from her lips, though it led to a lie spoken by her son. She *acted* a lie (verses 15, 16). What is a lie? All deception—a look, a shrug, as well as an untrue word. Yes, a lie can be made in other ways than in word. Those skins upon Jacob's neck and hands, that best

raiment of Esau's, were lies in *deed* (Rev. xxii. 15).

God hates a lie (Prov. xii. 22). He is *The Truth* (S. John xiv. 6), and if we lie, we are followers of the devil (S. John viii. 44).

But someone will say, Cannot much good be sometimes gained by a lie? Surely sometimes persons can do right, save life, for instance, by lying, and so work a blessing? The answer is, God does *not* need your lie to accomplish His work. You need faith, to trust in Him at all times, even in extremities. Rebekah probably argued as you are now arguing. She felt it was almost necessary to lie; that without it God could not fulfil His purpose, "the elder shall serve the younger." Like you, she saw a blessing could be gained by lying; and she gained it. The outward blessing was procured to Jacob. But what came with it? What did those lies bring with them? From that time the peace of the home *was gone*. From that time hatred and intended murder were at work in that family. Rebekah, the mother, had introduced that misery. She had to part with her much loved son, and she never saw him again. The sin of lying clung to her family, to her descendants.

So it is with all untruth; we may get what we want, but misery comes with it. There is but one

road back, if we have lies upon our conscience—it is the road of Confession—Confession to God (1 S. John i. 9). Confession to those we have deceived (Lev. vi. 2-6). And let us all pray, “Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be always acceptable in Thy sight, O Lord, my strength and my Redeemer.”

Leah.

Read Genesis xxix. 16-35; xxx. 17-20.



LEAH means *weary*. Shall we look at this life? There was much to make it weary. *Girlhood.* We can understand, can we not, the trouble of not being good-looking, of having a disfigurement. And then the great contrast in the sister who was so beautiful, and well favoured—a younger sister (verse 17). We can understand, can we not, the trouble of bad eyesight? The bright sunshine that seemed so pleasant to Rachel in her free, out-of-door life, as she tended her father's sheep, must have been a constant pain to Leah with those weak eyes of hers. I think Leah must have lived very much in the shade, and been debarred from many pleasures. It is not difficult to understand that there was much during the girlhood of Leah to make her life a weariness.

And then came womanhood. Leah had to see with a pang the happy love between Jacob and Rachel.

How beautiful it was!—those seven years of courtship that seemed to Jacob but as days. Leah lived through all, and knew that probably for her there never could be such a love, such a courtship, from any man. How terrible that disfigurement must have seemed to her then! But Leah was to step still deeper into the shade, to go much further along the valley of humiliation. Think of the degradation it must have been to her to be forced upon a man who had no thought for her. Think of the moment when the mistake was discovered, and Leah had to see the dying out of the bright happy love in Jacob's face, as he looked upon *her* face, and a look of repulsion, hatred, anger taking its place (verse 31). Then see what came to Leah with her womanhood, that wonderful power of loving, with no return. Leah loved her husband even though he hated her, for we are told she longed for his love (verse 32). Certainly she would have understood those words, "Love suffereth long, love beareth all things, endureth all things, never faileth" (1 Cor. xiii.). Now we see Leah working upwards through the valley of humiliation. We have gone down and seen the depths of Leah's weary life, the hatred of the man she loved, and yet there, down there, Leah found this wonderful power of love without return.

Do not think it is altogether sad. It is a triumph, a victory : it is a pledge of immortality.

Then came motherhood, and with it this deeper lesson. *God* was there. Yes, we are rising now : the shadow, the weariness, the degradation are passing away. Leah, not the beautiful Rachel, "*the Lord* looks upon." "The Lord seeth not as man seeth" (1 Sam. xvi. 7). Leah is the object of God's special care—"He careth for you" (1 S. Peter v. 7)—this was what she was learning. Listen to her words as the high calling of motherhood came to her. "The Lord hath looked upon my affliction" (verse 32) ; or again, "The Lord hath heard that I was hated, He hath therefore given me this son also" (verse 33). Leah, the weary, was drawing near to the source of strength and rest. We read, "God hearkened unto Leah" (chap. xxx. 17). What wonder then when she brought forth her fourth son her heart should be filled with praise, and she should say, "Now will I praise the Lord," my child "shall be called Judah"—Praise. Let us pause here, and think what it means, not only to Leah, but to all mankind, this song of praise. It means the Incarnation. Of the tribe of Judah Christ came. How much of the Magnificat could be said by Mary's ancestress Leah? "My soul

doth magnify the Lord, for He hath regarded the low estate of His handmaiden. He that is mighty hath done to me great things, and holy is His name. He hath filled the hungry with good things" (S. Luke i. 46-53).

And for ourselves. What chief lesson may we gather? "Ills that God blesses are our good, and unblest good is ill." Pain, sorrows *can be cast upon God*. There, and there only, can we read them right and get their true balance—*weigh them*. Even great troubles like Leah's—"When the Lord looked upon her," what must they have seemed then? What do they seem now? when she, of low estate, is the ancestress of Him Who says to all to-day, "Come unto Me, all ye that are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn of Me, for I am meek and lowly of heart; and ye shall find rest to your souls" (S. Matt. xi. 28, 29).

Rachel.

Read Genesis xxix.



WE all of us like the bright sunshine and bright things. To-day we think of Rachel. There seems to us so much sunshine about her. Hers was such a bright life, it held so many bright things—that free, out-of-door life with the sheep—her beautiful looks and fine strength—that meeting with Jacob—his strong, faithful love, an example for all generations. “Happy in love”; that is how we speak of it to-day for ourselves. Who does not wish for that blessing? Think how great a good to be so loved that seven years of labour seemed but a few days. Let us sum it all up, and ask ourselves—Has not this list a strong resemblance to our own day dreams? To be very good-looking, and to be admired; to be the one great love of a good man, his greatest treasure, then to be married, and not to be poor. Rachel, we say, was very fortunate, and her cup of happiness must have been

very full when she became a mother and Joseph was born. Rachel, like Leah, did feel the great mystery of motherhood—that God was there. “God remembered Rachel, God hearkened to her” (chap. xxx. 22).

Do you ask which lot we would choose—Leah’s or Rachel’s? In asking this question this is what we are doing, we are placing the present moment and the long ages side by side, things temporal beside things eternal—the things which are seen beside the things which are not seen. S. Paul made this calculation once, and he spoke of this present life as a moment; he said, “But for a moment” (2 Cor. iv. 17, 18).

There is something very brief about Rachel’s life. “The morning comes and goes.” There is an impatience about her. We read her impatient words, “Give me children, or I die.” “And Jacob’s anger was kindled against Rachel.” She had her desire, God hearkened. But Rachel’s bright, happy life ends with words of sorrow. “Benoni, son of my sorrow,” are the last words we hear from her.

Do we mean, then, that Leah’s lot was best because she out-lived Rachel? No. We are weighing one eternal honour put upon Leah, with the bright, happy life of Rachel. The honour of being the ancestress of Christ—the mother of

Judah, of whom, according to the flesh, Christ came. Judah, "Now will I praise the Lord"; Benoni, "Son of my sorrow." How great the contrast.

What great lesson may we learn for ourselves? Is it not this? Ever to pray to see something of the eternal weight of glory when we are looking upon things of time, and so to understand their value. The things of time are precious, but they fade away. It is good to be beautiful, to be loved, to be married, to be a mother. But God has things to give us that are infinitely greater. "He that doeth the will of My Father which is in Heaven, the same is My mother, and sister, and brother."

Dinah.

Genesis xxxiv. 1-5, 31.

INAH'S sin, Dinah's history is brought before us to-day that we may see what God calls the act that Dinah committed, how He looks upon it. The Bible tells us the truth, as it is in God's sight. This is what God said of Dinah : She was *defiled* (verse 2) ; the margin reads "humbled," lowered.

What do you mean—defiled ? Listen. Dinah lost that which she could never get again—*purity*. She could never be a pure virgin again. She marred a most beautiful temple, the temple of her body. She did violence to her womanhood. No, never again could she be the happy, pure girl of perhaps but a few weeks past ; light of heart, clean of mind, undefiled of body. Like Esau, what did she not barter ? What for ?—for the lust of the flesh.

Shechem, like many another, thought marriage would undo the past ; he really wished to marry

Dinah (verse 4). Would marriage alter that defilement? Could Dinah, if she had married Shechem, be again the happy, innocent girl; the same Dinah as she was before she was lowered, humbled? What about respect of the man for the woman, the woman for the man—and that dark act for ever on their memories? No, let us learn to see clearly—marriage may make possible a blameless future, but it can never in itself altogether wash away, or make clean, a defiled past. Then comes a whisper: Poor Shechem, poor Dinah, they loved each other so much; we read, “Shechem’s soul clave unto Dinah” (verse 3). Did they love? Was it real love?—*real* love?—when Shechem robbed Dinah of her pure womanhood? Did Dinah really love Shechem, when she let him sin? No, it was not Love, but Passion. “Love worketh no ill to his neighbour” (Rom. xiii. 10).

Let us face the lessons in this history for ourselves. Is someone thinking—Why should it be so very wrong to do this act? Of course (the same person is thinking) I can see it would be wrong if there was no question of marriage, but when two people really care for each other, and are quite meaning to marry, why should one act be defiled and the other undefiled, honourable?

1. Let us remember, man and woman are infinitely greater than the beasts which perish. God created man in His own image, in the image of God created He him, male and female created He them.

2. Therefore the acts of such beings should never descend to the level of the brute creation, aye, and even lower.

3. When they do thus descend, what is it but that they *defile*, lower, drag down their high and noble nature—manhood, womanhood. This is what the sin of fornication does, it tramples on, tries to destroy the image of God—manhood, womanhood. But marriage—Christian marriage—yes, and even civil, or the savage's marriage of consent—these are the acts of men, women, of beings come from God, Who is their home. Here is law, not lawlessness. Here are solemn life-long vows and pledges, not momentary passion.

Think of a Christian's marriage, and contrast it with the history before us. See its full sacramental meaning. When those vows are made, when the outward signs of the giving the ring and the joining of the right hands together by the Priest are fulfilled, it is holy, Christ is there, He it is Who says by the mouth of His servant, "Those whom God hath joined together let no man put asunder."

Let this be our lesson, "Keep innocency, and take heed unto the thing that is right, for that shall bring a man peace at the last" (Psalm xxxvii. 38, P.B. version).

Miriam, "The Elder Sister."

Read Exodus ii. 1-11.



WE first hear of Miriam as but a maid, as a young girl taking care of her baby brother. God has chosen that this story of a sister's care of a little brother should be remembered down the centuries. Then came the day when so ordinary a duty grew into something greater. As the sister stood afar off, watching the frail little vessel by the river's brink, her patience and courage were strained. Miriam bravely went to the King's daughter, and planned for her brother's life. And God rewarded the good elder sister. Her brother, Moses, grew up to be the greatest man of his day, for the Lord talked with him as His friend, face to face (Deut. xxxiv. 10).

Miriam, the worthy elder sister of a great man, became a leader and a teacher amongst God's people, she influenced the women of her day (Exod. xv. 20, 21). Think of all she had passed through—

slavery in Egypt—the time of uncertainty and uneasiness when God spoke by the plagues—the night of the Passover—the going out with haste—the pursuit of the enemy—the passing through the sea. And looking back on all this, what filled her heart and soul? "Sing ye to the Lord, for He hath triumphed gloriously, the horse and his rider He hath thrown into the sea" (Exod. xv. 20). These words are with us still. Miriam is accounted of God as a "Prophetess."

But sin dogs everybody. Temptation came to Miriam—of a kind that to her was very great—and she fell (Numb. xii.). What temptation is likely to come to an upright, great, superior, noble woman, the elder sister of two great men, one by whom God had spoken, one who was a great influence to all about her? *Pride*—the temptation to pride, a self-importance, a thinking she had a right to take her brother, the chosen servant of God, to task, that she was able to correct him. Miriam thought but little of her brother, and of his wife—the wife who, like herself, had shared in all the many trials of Egypt—Miriam despised her because she was of an alien race.

"And God dealt with Miriam." In a few hours she had to learn that she, not Moses' wife, was the

outcast from Israel. What lessons must she not have learnt during those seven days outside the camp? "Unclean, unclean," this she must say of herself. Do you not think she learnt the lesson that we would learn this afternoon? "Blessed are the poor in spirit"—those who feel themselves beggars, dependent upon God. "Blessed are the meek"—like her brother Moses (verse 3)—"for they shall inherit the earth" (S. Matt. v. 3-5).

The Women who worked for the Tabernacle.

Read Exodus xxxv. 20-29.

OD called these women “willing-hearted,” “wise-hearted” (verses 21, 25). At first we should not have thought about their hearts at all, we should have spoken about their riches, or their cleverness, when we looked at those gifts.

To-day our lesson is about giving. Here then is the first thought. What is it in God’s sight? It is *heart-giving*—a heart to love—a heart to plan—“hearts that are stirred”—“spirits that are willing”—“cheerful giving”—this is what God looks at when He sees gifts. A widow’s mite to Him may be more costly than the greatest abundance of the rich (1 Sam. xvi. 7; 1 Chron. xxix. 17; 2 Cor. ix. 7; S. Mark xii. 41-44). There is such a thing as giving without the heart, and God tells us it is “nothing.” “Though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor,

and though I give my body to be burned, and *have not charity*, it profiteth me nothing."

What did these women give? Their own possessions, their bracelets, the rings they could have worn in the ears, or on their fingers, there was no giving away of other people's belongings, as a cook may give her mistress's scraps to the beggar at the door. The servant may think she has been kind and charitable, really *she* has not given at all. Beside their own possessions, these women gave of *their own time*, and *their own labour*. "And all the women that were wise-hearted did spin with their hands and brought that which they had spun" (verses 25, 26). God does not mean us to take time that we owe to other people and spend it in working for the London poor, that is giving of other people's time. It is a happy thought for those who have very little time they can call their own, that when they "give of that little" (Tobit iv. 8, Offertory Sentences), like the widow's mite, it may be very precious in God's sight. It is not giving of our labour when we employ others to do our work for us. Think then of the full value there may be in giving. We may give, from our hearts, our own treasures, our own time, our own labour. And let us for a moment think of what Christ's giving was.

He gave Himself—heart, and time, and strength. He became poor for our sakes (2 Cor. viii. 9). “He emptied Himself of His Glory, and took upon Him the form of a bondservant, and was made in the likeness of men” (Phil. ii. 6, 7, 8; Eph. v. 2).

To whom did these women give? To God. “The Lord’s offering,” they called it (verses 21-24). “Unto the Lord” (verses 22-29). The Queen sometimes honours people by receiving a gift from them. “Her Most Gracious Majesty has been pleased to accept,” we read. But what is this honour compared to giving to God, the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, Whose Name is Holy (Isa. lvii. 15). These women gave to God, when they helped to build His house.

We, too, can do the same. Still “God loveth a cheerful giver” (2 Cor. ix. 7). We, too, can help to build Him a house of prayer. What are churches but offerings to the Lord? Have you ever thought that your hands, as these women’s hands, could work for God’s Sanctuary? Some laundresses have been known to give their labour free. They have undertaken to wash the surplices. Others, who have learnt at school darning and stitching, have given their time to repairing Church linen. And others, with a greater skill, are able to em-

broider and make many necessary material things for the Service of God. And yet in a higher way we can give to God. "I was an hungred, and ye gave Me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave Me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took Me in: naked, and ye clothed Me: I was sick, and ye visited Me: I was in prison, and ye came unto Me. Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me" (S. Matt. xxv. 35-40).

Deborah.

Read Judges iv. and v.



WHEN we think of Deborah, we may think of such words as, "God's servants the prophets" (Jer. vii. 25); or, "He spake by the mouth of His holy prophets" (S. Luke i. 70); or as we sing in the Te Deum, "The goodly fellowship of the prophets." Miriam, Huldah, Anna, Deborah, are women whose brains, and hearts, and lips were inspired by God, and used by Him for forthtelling, and even foretelling His messages. Deborah had yet another high calling. This woman of intellect was called to rule a nation, and to secure its independence. We read, "And Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lapidoth, she judged Israel at that time" (verse 4).

Can we not picture her—her tent pitched under a palm tree—the constant passing to and fro of persons coming to her for judgment. How strong she seems to us—with no weakness of will that is

fearful to face facts and come to a decision. How clear her mental grasp must have been. How wise in action she must have proved herself. We understand the powerfulness of her character when we read of Barak, a warrior, saying to her, "If thou wilt go with me, I will go." The answer is not an unnatural answer from *her* lips, "I will surely go with thee"—though the going meant following the army to the seat of war (verses 8, 9). And then when we read her marvellous Song of Praise, of Victory, what an insight it gives us into the soul of this woman—enthusiasm, courage, scorn of half-heartedness, marvellous imagination. She makes us see again to-day that scene in the tent of Heber the Kenite. Yes, see it in all its treachery, and courage. Do we not almost see, with her prophetic sight, the mother of Sisera at her lattice? Can we not hear her crying out so humanly, "Why is his chariot so long in coming? Why tarry the wheels of his chariot?" (chap. v. 28). But, greater still, can we not see, in Deborah's soul, the fire of God burning? The love of His honour, His glory; the consecration of her power of motherhood to all His people? "I will sing praise to the Lord God of Israel" (verses 3-7); or again, "The Lord made me to have dominion over the mighty"

(verse 13). "So let all Thine enemies perish, O Lord; but let them that love Him be as the sun when he goeth forth in his might" (verse 31).

Some one may say, "This story has not much in common with my life—I am no prophetess, and I am never likely to take any important post as a ruler; I have no genius, and cannot write poetry; I am not at all clever, and read very little—and that little but story books. I know, too, I have very little courage; I turn faint when I see illness or a painful sight, and I am not at all brave when there is danger, and any likelihood of an accident; I do not think I am unlike other women, lots of the girls I know are like this. The men say, 'O, you are only women, and it is of no use talking to you'; and the young lads like to startle us and make us shriek, and then say, 'Hark at the girls.' It is quite absurd to think of any of us helping to make a soldier brave. Fancy a soldier being willing to go to the battle because we were there. Oh, no! This Deborah is hardly like a woman."

All you are saying is very common talk indeed. Do you know what you are doing? You are letting go God's Ideal, and holding the world's opinion. Woman, as well as Man, was created in the *Image of God* (Gen. i. 27). In *Christ's Kingdom* there is no

difference between man and woman, but they are one (Gal. iii. 28). The Spirit of God is poured out upon both (Acts ii. 17, 18). Deborah speaks to us a special lesson. We see in her a full development of womanhood. She, the wife, the house mother, can become "a mother to Israel" (chap. v. 7). By the Spirit of God a woman can speak God's message. By the Spirit of God she can rule a nation. And have we not an example in this year 1897? Look back upon the sixty years' reign of our Queen. Has not the prayer that has been so often prayed for her been fulfilled: "Replenish her with the grace of Thy Holy Spirit, that she may always incline to Thy will, and walk in Thy way. Endue her plentifully with heavenly gifts, grant her in health and wealth long to live"?

By the Spirit of God a woman's intellect can be inspired. She, as well as man, has been called, as Deborah was called, to become a revealer of God's will and word (Psalm lxviii. 11, Rev. Vers.). By the strength and support of God's Spirit within her woman can have the noblest courage, so great that it can fire a man's courage. You know not what you are doing when you despise womanhood, and allow your mind to accept the idea that woman must be weak, helpless, silly, unreasonable, or less capable,

less dignified, than man. Deborah, and many another, have proved it is not true. "The fear of the Lord, that is wisdom" (Job xxviii. 28). "A woman that feareth the Lord, she shall be praised" (Prov. xxxi. 30).

Delilah.

Read Judges xvi. 4-20.



WHAT is flirting? To *play* with the love of another person, and to *willingly deceive*.

Delilah allowed Samson to show his love to her—she allowed him to be with her. She pretended his love was precious to her (verse 15). She really played him off with other men (verse 9), until we know she robbed him of the great gift God had given him. God left him, his strength left him, his self-respect must have left him.

But you are inclined to say—A little flirting is no great harm—everybody does it; of course I do not mean as badly as Delilah. For one moment let us put ourselves in Samson's place. There was very little harm in the seven withes, he knew he could break them; very little harm in the "new ropes," he could get free of them. There was very little harm, though he was on more dangerous ground, in having his hair woven. But added together these

things were harm. The withes, the rope, the web, they had an influence, they had done harm to the moral nature, they were binding him morally to Delilah's influence. Samson was trifling with his power to say "No" to temptation, and once on such a steady decline he fell completely.

And for ourselves, we may be all tempted to be like Samson or Delilah. Are we coming, like Samson, under the influence of a *bad character*? Could Samson have known better, was he quite in the dark? He knew what a good woman was like, he had had a good mother (chap. xiii. 23). He made no effort to find out if the woman was true or a traitor. Are any of us, like Samson, tempted to be willingly ignorant and blind as to the character of those with whom we keep company? Are we getting amusement and fun out of any bad companion? Dare at any cost to face the truth (S. John iii. 20). Are we tempted like Delilah? Have we great influence with men? All women have some influence, some more than others. How do we use those powers? Only for ourselves, our own gratification, and the *mean* pleasure of trifling? Do we play at an awfully real thing—Love? Do we rob a man of all that is best in him, when we never mean to return his love? Do we embitter his life, and make him lose faith in God,

and all that is pure and good? The heart of a true woman is sincere. Love must for her be without dissimulation. She dare not trifle, flirt, for love worketh no ill to his neighbour (Rom. xiii. 10).

Orpah.

Read Ruth i. 1-15.

WHAT do we mean by perseverance? Does it only mean "going on"? No, that is progress. It means much more. It means going on in the face of difficulties. It means going uphill, and down into dark places. It means, "Though I fall I shall arise again" (Micah vii. 8). It means holding still in the Lord in time of trouble (Hab. iii. 17-19; Job i. 21, 22; Isa. l. 10).

Orpah is an example of the want of perseverance. She, as well as Ruth, had said to her mother-in-law, "Surely we will return with thee unto thy people" (verse 10). Orpah really started with Naomi. "She went on the way to return unto the land of Judah" (verse 7). Orpah, as well as Ruth, wept, and shewed she cared for her sorrow-stricken mother-in-law (verse 14); and yet she "went back." She parted when the strain was greatest, when Naomi put before her the very worst should she keep with her (verses 14, 15).

Did it matter very much, we may think, that Orpah "went back"? Went back to what? Very likely to a comfortable home, with the possibility of marrying again, and this time with one of her own race. Yes, it was a comfortable "going back"; apparently it seemed a natural thing to do. It was natural if Orpah was made only for this life, with powers only meant for the enjoyment of the things of time, only for a happy bodily life. It is a natural thing for grafted roses to send out great suckers and to go back to the wild rose once again. And if the beautiful roses we see *were only wild* roses, those rank shoots need not be cut, but because they have such far greater possibilities, because they can become so much more beautiful, they must be trained, they must not be allowed to go back. And so it was with Orpah. She had a spirit, as well as a body. God had breathed into her (Gen. i. 26, 27; ii. 7).

What, then, did Orpah lose when she "went back"? She lost the means of gaining more knowledge of the true God. She gave up God, when she gave up His servant. She willingly put herself in the way of temptation. She went back to her false gods. We know that the religion of Moab was defiling (see Numb. xxv). Orpah had once known

the way of righteousness, and then went back from it.

Are there not times when it seems very natural to go back? That bad habit that we have tried to break—a wave of desire comes over us to do it again, it all looks so comfortable! That rule we have made for ourselves that often clashes with other people's ideas—how easy it seems and natural to break it! How much easier our life would be if we thought exactly like those about us! Why need we be peculiar? What a temptation it is to take a situation, where we shall have good wages, and an afternoon out; and the only drawback will be that we shall have no time on Sunday for going to Church, and certainly shall never be allowed to go to an early Communion. Shall we cleave to our better life? or shall we, like Orpah, “turn back”? Shall that which belongs to the flesh live and grow in us, or that which belongs to our spirits—Our spirits with boundless possibilities before them, capable of joy that cannot be expressed, capable of growth beyond all thought, capable to awake after Christ's likeness? (Psalm xvii. 15; 1 S. John iii. 2).

Remember, perseverance means, “Though I fall I shall arise again” (Micah vii. 8); “Faint, yet pursuing” (Judges viii. 4).

Ruth.

Read Ruth i. 14-22.



UTH speaks to us to-day two special lessons.
1. In her we see one who listened to and acted upon the promptings of her better nature. 2. She teaches us the *fidelity of true love*.

1. Sometime, somewhere, Ruth had realized that there was a higher life than mere self-pleasing. Was it from Naomi she had learnt it? I think so. Why should she so earnestly wish that Naomi's God should be her God? (verse 16). Then came great trouble—widowhood upon all, want, penury. Ruth saw before her two ways: one the prosperous way, but the worse way for Ruth's better life; the other a way, dark in the future, but with at least one clear step at its beginning, to love and cherish her husband's mother, and so to keep near to God by keeping near to His servant: and in following this life she knew the true life would live and grow in her. We know which way she chose. Like Mary,

“the better part” (S. Luke x. 42). Like Abraham and Sarah, she was willing to go forth, not knowing whither she went (Heb. xi. 8). This was faith (Heb. xi. 1).

We, too, have voices of two different natures. The lower nature, which says, “Let us before all things make this life a success; let us eat and drink, and be merry” (1 Cor. xv. 32; S. Luke xii. 19). Everything else is vague, let us have a good time now. The higher nature, “the Spirit in man,” the Breath of the Almighty (Job xxxiii. 4), the Spirit of Christ which we have received (Rom. viii. 9), if we will listen, says, Cleave to God, “Abhor that which is evil”; cleave to that which is holy, pure, and good, for it leads to God (Rom. xii. 9). Cleave to God’s household, the Church. She, with all her long years of experience, of sorrow, of struggle, shall she not guide you? Do not forsake her! will she not lead you to Bethlehem, the House of Bread? Your bread shall be given you—Heavenly Food—the bread which came down from Heaven. At the blessed Sacrament you will indeed find that her God is your God, and her people your people. Will you not listen? Will you not, like Ruth, be stedfastly purposed to go with her? (verse 18).

2. But Ruth is also a lesson to all, of the fidelity

of true love. What more beautiful troth pledge: "Entreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go, and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: where thou diest, I will die, and there will I be buried: the Lord do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me." These words have had a response in many hearts. Two friends, two newly betrothed, have often used them; but let us never forget they were words used by a daughter-in-law to her mother-in-law. This is not always an easy relationship to fill. There is a glamour over the love of friends and lovers; but what a quiet, unnoticed thing is the love of relations, it gets no praise, and yet it is this steady unselfish love that binds homes and families together. A nation is strong, if family love is strong.

Let us take this lesson when we read of Ruth—Are we faithful in our relationships? Are we friends to our relations? Do we long to help to support them? Does the love of those who are gone still work in our lives? Do we cherish those they would have cherished? Are they precious in our eyes? Read again those faithful words of Ruth, and remember they were said to her mother-in-law.

Hannah (1).

Read 1 Samuel i. 1-18.

HANNAH had two kinds of trouble. First, that which came from other people, without ; second, that which came from desire in her own heart, within.

First, outward trouble. An enemy at home always trying to provoke her. Why? Because she was jealous of her being loved so much. Yes, Hannah's outside trouble was having to live with a trying relation, who did not love her, and provoked her (verses 6, 7). How did Hannah bear this trouble? Did she make long complaints to her husband? No, he had to ask, "Why weepest thou?"

Second, inward trouble. There was one longing desire God had given her—the longings for motherhood—and yet no child was given to her. And as year followed year hope failed. Hannah became a "woman of a sorrowful spirit" (verse 15).

How did Hannah bear this weight of trouble?

Her name gives us the answer—Hannah means Prayer. She learnt what the words meant, “Cast thy burden upon the Lord” (Psalm lv. 22). Once, at any rate, in her life she put down all her sorrow before God, she put it into His Hands. She said, “I will no longer crave and yearn and hanker, I will give all my longings into God’s Hands, and leave them there. If He gives me my desire, I will receive it no longer as mine, but His ; He shall have it back again.” And in that moment of her life Hannah’s will was made one with God’s will, the loving correction of denial had done its work, it was needed no longer, already it had made Hannah great (Psalm xviii. 35). She rose from that act a truly happy woman. Though no outward circumstances were changed, yet her countenance was no more sad (verse 18).

And for us. Which of us is quite free from trouble? Have we to live with people who worry us? Are we adding to the trouble by being a worry to them? Is that the way we bear it, or are we quietly silent, like Hannah? Which of us has not some secret longings unsatisfied? Do we not often say—If only I could have that, I should be happy ; if only I were as rich, as prosperous, had such a nice house, were such a wife, had such nice children as

“So-and-so,” how happy I should be? And perhaps our trouble becomes so heavy that, like Hannah, we almost forget real present blessings. I think Elkanah felt this (verse 8). Even if our trouble were to grow so heavy as almost to crush the life out of all good close by us, how should we bear it? There is only one way, Hannah’s way—prayer—and some day we shall find that God’s loving correction has made us great (Psalm xviii. 35, P.B.V.), or, as the Bible Version explains it, “Thy gentleness hath made me great.”

Hannah (2).

Read 1 Samuel i. 19-28; ii. 1-11.



LAST Sunday, we learnt from Hannah what to "Cast thy burden upon the Lord" meant. This Sunday, we see the burden taken away; and yet we read—"Hannah prayed" (chap. ii. 1). Hannah means Prayer. *What is Prayer?*

Is it only begging? always asking for something? only saying, "Give us this day our daily bread"? Is this all Prayer means? Is it getting hold of good words, and saying them day after day without thoughts? Is it kneeling down and beginning, perhaps, a few words of prayer, and then letting our thoughts wander far away, so that when consciousness of the present returns we must jump up in a hurry and go to work? Is it asking God to make us good, "Lead us not into temptation," and then choosing deliberately the way of temptation, and courting evil? What is Prayer? Prayer is pouring out the heart before God. The sorrowful, sinful, dull, lonely heart; the gay, happy, satisfied, grateful,

adoring heart ; whatever is there may be poured out before God. This is Prayer.

So Hannah prayed, " If Thou wilt look upon my affliction." She also prayed, " My heart rejoiceth in the Lord." Both were prayers.

Why should we pray ? Because God has made us, and not we ourselves ; we are His people. Do you ask why a child should tell its mother and father all its troubles and joys ? No, it is so natural. Do you know *prayer is natural*. This is one of the great facts that prove that we belong to God, that we have a Father. There is hardly any savage whose heart does not cry after God—blindly, feebly, but the cry is there. Yes, prayer is natural ; it is a part of our nature. But if we neglect, or never train, a natural power (singing, for instance), the power may be lost, or enfeebled. So with prayer, we need to be taught to pray (S. Luke xi. 1, 2). We need to use the power of prayer, and it will grow stronger and truer.

Have you ever felt the presence of someone you love and care about, so really that all you do or say in their presence is done (almost unconsciously) with them in your mind's eye. That is what prayer may become some day when, " without ceasing," we pour out our hearts before God (1 Thess. v. 17 ; Ps. lxii. 8).

Abigail, "The Begetter of Joy."

Read 1 Samuel xxv.



THE wife of a churl, a drunkard, rightly named, "fool" (verse 25). How does Abigail, this noble, beautiful woman, "of good understanding," treat her husband? (verse 3). An angry man, a leader of four hundred men, is coming in his wrath to destroy her brutal husband (verse 13). That leader was David, a man of honour, whose men had dealt honourably by Nabal. "These men were very good to us, and we were not hurt, neither missed we anything. They were a wall unto us both by night and day all the while we were with them" (verses 15, 16). And yet by Nabal they had been treated with dishonour, "he railed at them" (verse 14).

What does Abigail do? Does she say Nabal deserves to be punished, let him look out for himself; I shall go to meet this great lord, and throw myself upon his protection; my beauty will influence him

not to hurt me ; I shall be safe and delivered from so vile a man ? Are these her thoughts ? No.

She thought nothing about herself, she only saw sin all around her—her husband's sin—the sin of his enemy. And her one thought was to use all her influence to prevent fresh evil. In this work of Abigail's may we not see the work of a true woman ? Was she not what God meant woman to be—man's "help meet" ? Her beauty, her womanhood, her good understanding, all were used to help man to do right. How sensible and beautiful are her words to David. What tact and religious force they display. She stops David's impulsive desire for slaughter by speaking of the Lord's battles (verse 28). Could personal revenge be called "a battle of the Lord" ? See how far the influence of a true woman can spread. Little did Abigail know that day when she went forth so bravely, her heart charged with so great a mission, the mission of peace, that some of her words would be recorded as a part of God's revelation. Truly she has been a "begetter of joy" to many who have read—"But the soul of my lord shall be bound in the bundle of life with the Lord thy God" (verse 29).

What do I know of such influence ? Could the words from my tongue ever be fit to be remembered ?

68 Abigail, "The Begetter of Joy."

Do I long to use all my influence to keep people from sinning? How do I protect those who are sinful? Do I try to help them in spite of themselves? Do I wish for this? Like Abigail, I must really trust God—believe in Him.

Think what it must have been for Abigail to hear: "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, Which sent thee this day to meet me, and blessed be thy advice, and blessed be thou, which hast kept me this day from coming to shed blood and from avenging myself with mine own hand" (verses 32, 33).

We, too, may hear this blessing—we may hear, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God" (S. Matt. v. 9).

The Witch of Endor.

Read 1 Samuel xxviii. 7-25.



NOTICE the description God has given us of this woman—"She had a familiar spirit" (verse 7). She had some evil spirit which was able to make its home in her—that is the meaning of "familiar"—and by its wider and greater knowledge it could give her insight into forbidden things.

Our subject to-day brings us to the border land of the unseen world of spirits. God, in the Bible, sometimes gives us a glimpse into the unseen. And what is it that we see? Life. Do we not see this in the world of bodily life, in the darkest cave, the deepest sea, in the air? The microscope has shown us there life, bodily life. In the spirit-world, to which we are all hastening—nay, in which we are all now living—there is life. People say—Do you believe in ghosts? A ghost means a spirit, and our answer comes—We do. Has not Christ spoken to us about spirits, and said, "A spirit hath not flesh

and bones as ye see Me have"? (S. Luke xxiv. 39). But we do not believe many of the meaningless things that are told us about spirits. To-day God has revealed to us that there are evil spirits, and that it is possible to go to the devil instead of to God, to become a friend of the devil, and to have a familiar spirit at home in our nature. There are many other places in the Bible which teach this lesson (Lev. xx. 27; xix. 31; Deut. xviii. 10-14; 2 Kings xxi. 6; Rev. xvi. 13, 14; 1 S. Peter v. 8).

But you will say there are no witches now, though there may have been in the past. Are you sure of what you are saying? What are spiritualism, spirit rappings? Are they meaningless, or are they necromancy (that means consulting the dead)? And God says, "There shall not be found among you a consulter with familiar spirits, or a wizard, or a necromancer; for all that do these things are an abomination unto the Lord" (Deut. xviii. 11, 12). What are Planchette, Palmistry? You say they are only amusements, and do no harm. Are you sure of this? Is there no lingering belief that by their means you can learn your "fate"? And is not knowledge gained in such a way foolish and harmful? These things are either harmful folly, or wicked knowledge.

Why should a Christian who has been marked with the sign of the Cross, study the marks on his hands? He knows by that greater sign what his future really may be—he who is a member of Christ, a child of God, an inheritor of the kingdom of Heaven; and by that sign he is pledged to renounce the devil and all his works. Why should the Christian hold converse with departed spirits, when he is the temple of the Holy Ghost?

“And His that gentle voice we hear,
Soft as the breath of even,
That checks each thought, and calms each fear,
And speaks of Heaven.”

But one thing is very real to a Christian, it is the secret influence of evil. It may seem an awful thought that a woman, as this woman of Endor, could be the home of an evil spirit, that wherever she went that evil companion would go with her. You have heard of hypnotism, mesmerism, that is the influence of one strong human will over another weaker will. It is a piteous thing to see a man the tool, the puppet, of another. But think what it must be to be in the power of the devil. *It need never be.* A stronger than Satan, Christ our Lord, has come. He can make you strong in Him, and in the power

of His might ; and just as you can always resist mesmerism by an effort of your *will*, so, by God's help, you can resist the devil, and he will flee from you. For—blessed contrast—if you draw nigh to God, He will draw nigh to you (S. James iv. 7, 8).

Bathsheba.

Read 2 Samuel xi. ; xii.



WE have read this history of an awful sin ; let us see what steps led to this great sin.

I. It was a time of idleness, of leisure for the man and the woman. We do not know if it was wrong for the King not to go to the battle ; it would seem to us as if he were wanting in the brave strong feelings of his soldier Uriah—"The Ark and Israel and Judah abide in tents ; and my lord Joab, and the servants of my lord are encamped in the open fields ; shall I then go into my house to eat and to drink, and to lie with my wife ? As thou livest, and as thy soul liveth, I will not do this thing" (verse 11). But we do know that this temptation came to him after he had been resting on his bed all the long hot day (verse 2). And for Bathsheba it was an uneventful time ; her husband was away, and therefore as an Eastern woman she was not much in touch with the outer world (verse 6). And doubt-

less, too, she had been resting her body all through that long hot day, and now that it was cooler, she thought of a refreshing bath. This leisure may not have been wrong. Only *it was Satan's opportunity*.

Thank God for busy lives, for work ; it is a blessing in disguise. We need to watch our leisure time, our holidays—Christmas and other Bank Holidays. For these are times when our bodies are getting a good deal of indulgence, more bed, more food, exciting games, dancing. I do not say these things are wrong, but when the body is being thought of, and having a good time, *then* is Satan's time to tempt the fleshly side of our nature. Many a drunkard began to sin on a Bank Holiday. Many a girl has lost her purity, been defiled, when out for a "spree" on a general holiday.

2. There was a lack of reserve and modesty in the woman. Bathsheba was not careful enough to guard herself, so that she should never tempt a man through her negligence. How came it that she should bathe where she could be seen from the roofs of other houses ? We have no reason to think she did this intentionally, but we feel she was wanting in woman's modesty, and this led to adultery.

And what about ourselves ? Are we careful in these matters ? How do we behave at home ? Is

there womanly reserve about us? How about the way we dress; is it modest, or does it court attention and make persons notice us? Is it untrue to say that there are many steps that lead to the sin of adultery and sins of that nature? Idleness, bodily indulgence, immodesty, are all steps down this awful road. Is it awful? Does God think it awful? Uriah learnt its awfulness; he lost his wife, and he was murdered. David learnt its awfulness. "My sin is ever before me. Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Thy sight" (Psalm li. 3, 4). The sword did not depart from his house, his sons inherited the same evil nature. Bathsheba learnt its awfulness, when she looked upon the sufferings of her baseborn child, and watched it die (verses 18-24). The child, the innocent child—is it not awful to brand the life of the child? How many have learnt the awfulness of the sin of their parents.

And God—Who is Love—what must this sin be in His sight? He to Whom all hearts are open, and Who knows the defilement and suffering it brings into the world? It is a direct sin against love; it is infidelity, and perfidy. Let us pray that we may be brought to see it as David saw it—"I have sinned against the Lord" (verse 13).

Rizpah.

Read 2 Samuel xxi. 8-14.



HAT have we read? We have read of a woman watching alone day and night, probably for nearly two months, beside seven dead bodies. What took her there? Love. What kept her there? The courage born of love.

Let us place ourselves in this woman's position. Think what she had to look upon—decay, corruption. Yet there was reverent love for those sad, ghastly remains. Were not two of them her sons? She could not bear to think of the dishonour to their bodies should they be devoured by birds of prey, or beasts of the field; and so she watched—this loving, feeble, lonely woman—by her dead (verse 10). As we think of Rizpah's great love, her anxiety that the bodies of her loved ones should not be ill-treated, may we not think of the mighty love of God, Who has told us "that a woman may forget her child, yet He will never forget"? (Isa. xlix. 15). What must

be *God's* care for the dead? Can we not commit our own bodies and the bodies of our dear ones into His keeping? Can we not feel sure *He* will preserve our bodies? The seed that must be sown must die in order to be quickened (1 Cor. xv. 36). Will they not be restored as glorious bodies, celestial bodies (1 Cor. xv. 44).

But how can Rizpah's example come home to us in our daily life? Have we the courage that is born of love, or, to think still further, *do we really love*? When illness, dangerous illness, comes, when we have to look at what is painful, repulsive, are we afraid? Do we try to avoid going near the one so ill? And when death has come, and the silence of death has come, how do we treat our dead? What reverence do we show in the presence of death? Do we honour them by doing all they would wish to be done? Are we frightened at the sight of death? Do we feel we could not be alone with a dead body? Do we make a great noise, or faint, or have hysterics? Think of that calm, strong woman beside her dead.

Oh that we might shrink from what is really ghastly, loathsome—I mean *sin* (1 Cor. xv. 56; S. James i. 15). We shudder at death, which is the result of sin, and yet a girl will give herself to a man

who is living in sin, while she would be afraid to be alone with a dead body. What must the Angels think of this—they who read this world truly? What must Jesus think of this—He Who would save His people from their sins? (S. Matt. i. 21).

The Queen of Sheba.

1 Kings x. 1-13.



SEBA, or Sheba, in the extreme of Arabia, many hundred miles from Jerusalem—the travellers to come from thence to Jerusalem would have to cross a long stretch of desert. This woman, this Queen, this traveller came. *What was it all for?*

The Queen of Sheba had a mind that was alive; that mind often longed for light; a voice within her often spoke and asked questions, and she could not answer them. Can we think of some of these mind questions? “Where is God? Where can I meet with Him? Where have I come from? Why am I alive? What is death? Why is there pain and suffering? What is sin?” These and many other questions were in her heart. How do I know it? Because such questions come to every soul.

How did this Queen deal with these questions? *She kept them in her heart* (verse 2). She did not

stifle them by leading such a busy gay life as to have no time to think. She did not drown them by becoming more and more like an animal, that only thinks of its body ; but, like the Blessed Virgin, she pondered them in her heart (S. Luke ii. 19). There they lived, and when the time came they sprang up into life.

Now we understand the reason of that long, troublesome and costly journey. The Queen had heard of the wisdom of a great King, and especially “concerning the Name of the Lord” (verse 1). Her soul was thirsting for God (Psalm lxiii. 1). She hungered and thirsted after all that was right (S. Matt. v. 6). Is it very strange to satisfy hunger, to quench thirst ? This Queen had soul hunger, her undying soul thirsted ; and when she knew where satisfaction could be found, what was distance, expense, weariness ; what did it matter if she was misunderstood ?

And for ourselves—we, too, have living souls. Do they not speak ? and ask questions ? Is life worth living ? Where are we journeying ? What can take away sin ? These questions—what are we doing with them ? Only two things can be done—stifle them, or face them *and get them answered*.

Thank God, “A greater than Solomon is here”

(S. Luke xi. 31). Yes, God in human flesh, the Man Christ Jesus, He is with His Church. He is with us "all the days." Still we may come into His presence. In the hour of our Communion we may commune with Him of all that is in our hearts. He alone can answer all the questions of each soul. Is life worth living? Yes, He has lived human life, it must be very much worth living. Where are we journeying? We are following the footsteps of the Good Shepherd (S. John x. 4; xiv. 1-5). What can take away sin? my sin? "The Blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin" (1 S. John i. 7).

The Greater than Solomon has said that one day this Queen will rise up in the judgment and condemn many (S. Luke xi. 31). Will she not? Look at her earnestness, her patience, her efforts, and then look at ourselves. We have not to cross deserts, or pay a great price for our journey. But we have to struggle with sloth.

How about our religion? does it cost us anything? Do we struggle at all? What time do we give in the morning? by day? at night? Think about our preparation for the presence of Christ when we come to the Holy Communion. And then, when we stand in the presence of the Lord, have we hearts full of other things, just vague ramblings of the mind?

Or is there a storage there kept for communion with Him? Do we bring Him any gifts at all?

Yet one more thought. This story is not only a picture of Christ's Kingdom of Heaven upon earth, His Church, it reaches further still, to the time when "the Tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be with them, and be their God" (Rev. xxi. 3). It is a picture of Heaven. Then only will these words be fully understood and felt, "Happy are these Thy servants which stand continually before Thee, that hear Thy wisdom." Then, too, it will be said, "The half has not been told." And when the redeemed meet around that throne, all thought of self, and self-importance will have gone. They will say, "Blessing and honour, and glory, and power, be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever" (Rev. v. 13).

Jezebel and her daughter Athaliah.

Read 1 Kings xvi. 31-33; xviii. 4; xxi. 1-25; 2 Kings viii. 18-26; ix. 22-37; xi. 1-16.

IN taking this lesson we shall think especially of Jezebel; but we shall find much that is said of her could be said of her daughter, and at the very outset this brings us face to face with the solemn fact of heredity. Think—parents can give to their children evil or good tendencies!

Jezebel—a king's daughter (2 Kings ix. 34), the wife of a king, a powerful woman by position and character. The whole story to-day brings before us the powerful influence of a wicked woman. As we read the history of this woman, we cannot help noticing how all things bow before her. Look at the king, her husband—he is but a tool in her hands—he sold himself to this woman to work wickedness. She it was who stirred him up to the sacrifice, she made him do her will (1 Kings xxi. 25). The whole nation, as a nation, submitted to her.

They changed their religion, and followed Baal (1 Kings xvi. 31). Though seven thousand individuals, God knew, were true to Him, God's prophets were destroyed by the order of this woman (1 Kings xviii. 4). Naboth had courage to hold his own, to keep his own inheritance, and his life and his inheritance were taken from him. Jezebel is a living example of how strong and powerful sin is.

Do we not see it to-day? Let anyone strive against sin, and they will understand something of its strength. Once try to break the yoke of sin—some evil habit of self-indulgence, sloth, vanity, passion—once really struggle, and then we know it means fighting, desperate fighting, or selling ourselves as Ahab sold himself. "The devil's power is more than human." But to-day's lesson does not leave us there. "The devil's power is more than human—but less than Divine." Jezebel was very strong: but Elijah, in God's strength, was stronger. What is the meaning of the whole of that eighteenth chapter, but this—"The Lord reigneth, be the people never so impatient: He sitteth between the Cherubims, be the earth never so unquiet" (Psalm xcix. 1). One man, standing in the strength which God supplies, was able to withstand four hundred

and fifty foes, and to bring back a nation to confess, "The Lord He is the God, the Lord He is the God." Jezebel was very strong, *but not for ever*. There was a day when of this Queen it was said—"Go, see now this cursed woman, and bury her: for she is a king's daughter. And they went to bury her: but they found no more of her than the skull and the feet and the palms of her hands" (2 Kings ix. 34, 35).

And it is true now. If you, like Elijah, boldly defy evil, if you really try to "Fight the good fight with all your might," because "Christ is your strength and Christ your right," you will learn what strength really means, and that you are "on the winning side." Do you think Ahab was bound to be stirred up to sell himself to work wickedness? Of course he was not, if he had sided with God (2 Cor. xii. 9, 10; Phil. iv. 13).

God alone is eternal, and all things linked to God. Evil can only triumph for a time. Let us never think "though right were worsted wrong will triumph." No, we "fall to rise, are baffled to fight better, sleep to wake." "The kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign for ever and ever" (Rev. xi. 15).

The Widow of Zarephath (1).

Read 1 Kings xvii. 8.



WE have this special reason for thinking about this widow woman, namely, that our Lord has singled her out as worthy of attention. He pointed to her story as an illustration that God is no respecter of persons (S. Luke iv. 26). Many widows were in Israel—the prophet is not sent to these, but to a heathen, a poor widow, living in an obscure village. “But He Who seeth not as man seeth” (1 Sam. xvi. 7), “Whose eyes are in every place, beholding the evil and the good” (Prov. xv. 3), He saw in this poor woman “one that feared God and worked righteousness, and she was accepted of Him” (Acts x. 35).

This, too, we must notice—where this poor widow dwelt. She was a fellow-country-woman of the wicked Queen Jezebel. Jezebel’s father was King of the Zidonians; Zarephath belonged to Zidon (1 Kings xvi. 31; xvii. 9). What strange

irony there seems in this fact, that an obscure fellow-country-woman of the wicked Queen should at one time preserve the life of that prophet whom the Queen hated! (1 Kings xix. 2). Is it not to show us how small and weak the greatest human power is against God, that God can choose the weak things of the world to confound the mighty, the base things of the world, and things which are despised, God can choose, "that no flesh should glory in His presence"? (1 Cor. i. 27-29).

Zarephath means "workshop for refining metals." It would seem to us a parable of this poor widow's life, and of our own lives. May not each home, with all its surroundings, be a Zarephath, "a workshop for refining metals"? God brought out all that was best in this widow—first, by the commands He gave her to fulfil; second, by what He asked her to resign.

God said to Elijah, "Behold, I have commanded a widow woman to sustain thee" (verse 9). How did this commandment come to the woman? There was no supernatural sign, no voice from Heaven. It came to her in the voice of a stranger, a traveller, one in like distress with herself. "Fetch me," the voice called to her, "I pray thee, a little water in a vessel, that I may drink" (verse 10). That cry of

distress, and then the voice of conscience, made a command from God. We can think of the inward thought, the strong response of that true heart God was refining; in spite of scarcity, in spite of coming death, the widow went to fetch the water. This obedience could be yet more strongly confirmed. Elijah, as God's prophet, speaks another command. "Bring me, I pray thee, a morsel of bread in thy hand" (verse 11). This seemed to her almost an impossibility, she has it not—not one cake is left; only a handful of meal, and a little oil in a cruse. What could she do with this; was it possible to "give of that little"? What was there about that stranger? Did she begin to see in his strong face the marks of a holy man of God? We might think that something of the truth had come into her mind, by the words, "As the Lord thy God liveth"; so that the next words spoken to her—the next command—was a challenge to her faith in God. "Fear not; go and do as thou hast said; for thus saith the Lord God of Israel, The barrel of meal shall not waste, neither the cruse of oil fail. . . . *And she went and did according to the saying of Elijah*" (verses 13-15).

Love to man, faith towards God—these are the precious metals God would refine, and bring forth

in all their purity and value. What do we know of these? Have we faith? Have we love and pity? These great and precious things must grow, God will call them forth. When a letter comes from home, saying, father is not well, and mother must go out to work, and you are wanted home to see to father and look after the children; when that fretful old neighbour, as we pass her door, calls us by name, and asks us to give her some water to drink, or to see to the fire, or go to the shop—these are God's ways of refining us. Think of all the ceaseless calls upon us from the outside world. Think of our daily lives, those of us who are servants; how different it might all look, if we thought of our homes as the workshop where true metal is refined; and if we said of *all* our surroundings: "He"—God—"knoweth the way that I take, and when He hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold." Remember, this only comes when we listen, as this widow did, to God's call—and obey. To us, whatever they may be, God's commands should not be grievous. For they come to us from Christ, Who says, "Take My yoke upon you and learn of Me, for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest unto your souls; for My yoke is easy and My burden is light." And He has said, "Inasmuch as ye have

done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me" (S. Matt. xxv. 40). And He has taught us to pray, "Lord, increase our faith" (S. Luke xvii. 5).

The Widow of Zarephath (2).

Read 1 Kings xvii, 17-24.



LAST Sunday we learnt how God brought out all that was best in this poor widow by the commands He gave her to fulfil. We saw how obeying these commands brought great blessing. This is where man generally ends his stories of life; some blessing comes after a great trial, and we are left with the feeling that the heroes and heroines will "live happily ever afterwards." But God tells the story of life differently; He says, "A whole I planned," and the time of happiness is not the crowning point in a life. This Sunday we are to learn from the "after these things" that God brought out what was best in this widow also by what He asked her to resign.

Let us see what she had to face. She had lived through the famine, her child's life had been saved. What for? Only to live a few months longer, fall sick, and die. Now was a darker day than the day

of bodily dearth, for now her soul had dearth. "What have I to do with thee, thou man of God?" (verse 18). Has the goodness of God been such as only to increase my sorrow, to raise hopes in me of His love and mercy, only that I may suffer more intensely? Is it out of vengeance, "to call my sin to remembrance, and to slay my son"? (verse 18).

Poor woman, she clung to the dead body of her son; she held *that* to her bosom, and she nearly left hold of her faith and trust in God; almost, but not quite. God, by His prophet, spoke to her through her sorrow. The man of God said, "Give me thy son," and she let him take the dead child from her arms, and carry it from her sight. Her faith was strong enough for that.

And for each of us all. Sorrows, losses have the voice of God within them. God asks us to give up sometimes what we feel most dear. Shall we hear His voice, "Give Me thy son"? Shall we let Him take it away out of our sight, and trust that it is safe in His keeping? This is what the Christian does when he stands beside the grave. He can really give that sacred dust into God's keeping.

The prophet took the child; he prayed. How simple is his prayer; he asks exactly for what he needs—he tells God of the soreness in his heart.

Life is given back (verse 22). The mother receives her son (verse 23). Now she rises to a higher sense of God, she has proved His unfailing love. "Now I know," etc., and that the word of the Lord in thy mouth is true (verse 24).

And for us. When God asks us to give up what most we prize, can we not trust His love? Can we not feel quite sure we shall see that every word, every act, every discipline, was needed—done for a true purpose? Above all, from this story may not the Christian learn that if that child was restored to life by the hands of Elijah, how much more certain is that other resurrection? "Even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him" (1 Thess. iv. 14).

The Rich Woman of Shunem—The Life of Temperance.

Read 2 Kings iv. 8-37.



THE life of temperance, what is it but the controlled life, the life of self-restraint?

Look at this woman's life: there are many points in her history and in her character that we might touch upon—her thoughtfulness for others, her care for all that was holy, and therefore her special kindness to "The holy man of God." Her faith—was she not one whom the writer to the Hebrews had in his mind when he said, "Through faith Women received their dead raised to life again"? (Heb. xi. 35). Surely you may say, faith is the great lesson we may learn from her; think of those words that she answered, "It is well," even though her child was lying dead upon the bed. Yes, her faith was great. If we study all that was written of her we shall learn that faith wrought in her the special grace of temperance.

The Woman of Shunem is an example through all time of the calm strength of self-control.

In the time of prosperity. What an atmosphere of self-restraint is all around her. There was a moment when the rich woman of Shunem could have grasped the opportunity of exchanging a retired life for a life of greater distinction, she could have secured Royal favours. "Wouldst thou be spoken for to the king or the captain of the host? And she answered, I dwell among my own people." Would you and I have given this answer—words so full of dignity and restraint? Should we have let slip such an opportunity of being better known, such an opportunity of gaining a higher position, as the world counts position? Are our ambitions to be great in this world so curbed and restrained? Are we content with such things as we have? Do we see all the blessings in those things? Are we following too much the devices and desires of our own hearts? Do you think our wishes are so controlled, their clamouring so silenced, that it must be the voice of another that will express them? Should we have been silent when the prophet asked us to express a desire? *The* desire of this woman's heart, the strongest desire of a woman's nature, the desire of motherhood, had been so restrained, that no word escaped her lips. And

when that desire was dragged into light, when another put into words the great wish of her heart, there is no sensational display of feeling, no dwelling upon the years of disappointment, there is only the fear that her restraint and control may be tried beyond their strength. "Nay, my lord, thou man of God, do not lie unto thy handmaid" (verse 16).

In the time of trouble. We have but to read the passage ; the very simplicity of its language tells of calm restraint in the hour of death. The child quietly dying upon her lap—how welcome, for the child, the lap of that gentle, patient mother. Can you not see them both, and realize the stillness ? Is not the picture the very reverse of many a home when trouble and illness come ? Why make ye this ado ? would be more often true of what surrounds the death-bed in many homes. And when death had laid its hand upon her child, when that stillness which is the reverse of life surrounded her, her self-control is unbroken, she will not break that quiet by her wailing. Calmly she carries her dead child, and with her own hands places his body in that simple, yet sacred room. With what self-restraint she meets her husband and makes her request. She does not let him know of their great sorrow. And when the object of her journey is attained, when she

is in the strong presence of one who could bear her grief, even then there is no loss of calmness, no indulged weakness, no "break down," as we might express it. Listen. "Is it well with the child?" and she answered, "It is well." See her bowed in sorrow at the prophet's feet. Hear her confession of her long self-discipline, her yielded will (verse 28). No passionate words escape her. She lays her burden before God when she clings to His servant.

What a sifting time trouble is. When trouble comes to us, what does it find in us? Do we know anything of the self-control that will not burden others, but seeks only to lay hold upon the strength of God? Could it ever be said of us, "Thy loving correction had made me great"? Do we not often help to stir agitation in our homes in times of anxiety? Do we not often fill other souls with dismay by expressing our own dismay? Do we not give full vent to all our grief, and cry, even sometimes go into hysterics? Would anybody die peaceably in our arms? Could we keep so still and control our agitation? Could we lay out our dead? Could we look upon that still, resting form, and say, "It is well."

In the time of deepest joy. Have you ever thought of the eloquence of this woman's silence? There are sorrows and joys too deep for words. Her joy

was fulfilled. No imperfect words pass her lips. The self-restraint of her life has reached its highest effort. "Then she went in, and fell at his feet, and bowed herself to the ground, and took up her son and went out" (verse 37).

It is difficult to carry a full cup with a steady hand. If God gives us a great joy, a great happiness, how shall we meet it? Shall we not pray, "In all time of our wealth, good Lord, deliver us"?

Someone may be thinking—Why not call the life of this woman the life of self-control? Why use the word temperance? I am so tired of the word; it only means to me taking the pledge and being a total abstainer, and wearing a blue ribbon or some other badge. I am glad to answer your thoughts—they are surface thoughts, about surface things which are dead and worthless if the full meaning of temperance has gone out of them. Temperance is a much deeper and larger thing. Temperance is full control of *all* our nature, body, mind, and spirit. It means discipline, restraint, balance. Could we but train ourselves, as this woman trained herself, what a different world this would be! Temperance is a fruit of the Holy Spirit. It is the last of that wonderful list (Gal. v. 22, 23). Is it because it gives balance to them all? That upon it all can rest?

The Girl Slave to Naaman's Wife.

Read 2 Kings v. 1-19.

E do not know this girl's name. We know of her position, a captive and a slave. She belonged, like a horse or a dog, to her master. She was in bondage. What she ate, when she slept, what she did, what she wore, where she lived, whom she married—in all this she had no voice, it was all settled for her. No time was her own, no holiday times, no goings home, or afternoons out, no money to buy what she liked ; *and yet her spirit was freer*, less bound and crushed, than ours often are. Why ? Because she served God as well as being Naaman's slave. She was not ashamed to own God and His people in a heathen household, where she was a slave.

And we, though we are living in a free country, in our own homes, we are often afraid to confess our faith. We keep it secret that we stay to the Holy Communion, or use any other means of grace. We

let low words and profane jokes about God pass ; we allow holy things to be spoken lightly of ; we repeat, or join in the laugh at jokes made from the Bible. Do we ever say, when we hear of some foul sin, of which leprosy is only a faint type, " Would to God that such an one knew of the way to Christ's Presence, and would confess and be recovered of her leprosy " ? Do we not rather join in the common talk, and spread more stories about her, and not mind how we blacken her name ? This slave girl puts us to shame with her beautiful free spirit, and her thought for others when she herself was a captive. When we think of this captive slave girl let us think of the words, " Whosoever, therefore, shall confess Me before men, him will I confess before My Father Which is in Heaven ; but whosoever shall deny Me before men, him will I also deny before My Father Which is in Heaven " (S. Matt. x. 33).

Look at the result of this slave girl's courage. Not only is she the means by which her master regains health and strength. It was a great thing that through her efforts " his flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child, and he was clean " (verse 14). But what must it have been to her to have that master from that time acknowledge and worship only the Lord Jehovah ! And Naaman

said, "For thy servant will henceforth offer neither burnt offering nor sacrifice unto other gods, but unto the Lord" (verse 17).

It is not different now. There is still no power like the power of goodness and truth. We see how evil spreads: but have you ever tried to follow the influence of one true life lived in the service of God?—a life such that all the words spoken, the actions done, move and constrain all who come within their influence. *Now*, there are those living who let their light so shine before men that they who see their good works will glorify their Father Which is in Heaven (S. Matt. v. 16).

But you will say—I do not see how I can speak for God. I know so little, and I am not likely to have the opportunity. Are you quite sure you are speaking truly about the question of opportunity? It was not many words that came from this slave-girl's lips. You know more than she knew. Have you never an opportunity of confessing your faith, of owning you reverence prayer, that you are a Communicant? What about your intimate friends? How many secrets you tell them. This, the greatest secret of your life, do you hide from them?

Vashti, the Queen who Abhorred that which is Evil.

Read Esther i. 10-22.



WOMAN, a Queen, a Wife—Vashti had to be true to each of these callings.

A woman. What do we mean by a true woman? We say in praise, "That is a thoroughly womanly girl." What do we mean? We mean the absence of all boldness, rude noisiness, rough ways, uncontrolled familiarity, immodesty. And we mean "that which seeketh not her own, vaunteth not itself, is not easily provoked, doth not behave itself unseemly, beareth all things, endureth all things"—Love (1 Cor. xiii.). Is it no lesson to us that love is a feminine word? (seeketh not *her* own). Let us look at Vashti, and see how she was true to her womanhood. She would not do that which was unseemly. So true was she to her womanly instincts that she would not allow herself to be vaunted and made a spectacle for men influenced

with wine, even though it might cost her her crown and her position as a wife. Not easily provoked: we hear of no wrangling, or disrespectful words; there is only the calm dignity of doing that which was right. Vashti stands before us as a woman who could bear all things, endure all things, rather than violate her womanliness, and thus obey man rather than God, Who gave her that nature (Acts v. 29).

And for ourselves. Vashti means "beautiful woman." We may not all have the gift of outward physical beauty, but it is given to us all to be Vashtis in our inner lives, and therefore our daily lives. Yes, we may all have those ornaments S. Peter speaks of, which are of such high value with God (1 S. Peter iii. 3, 4). Are we never tempted as Vashti was tempted? Should we have answered "No" to such a request? Do we never try to attract attention? never make loud remarks just as we are passing men in the streets? or laugh loudly, and stare, just to be noticed? What are we doing? We are selling our womanhood, we are parting with that which is *most* beautiful, we are degrading that which should have all honour—the Image of God.

A Queen—a public example—it was this that was used as an argument by the princes (verses 16, 17).

She was an example to all women; for their sakes, for the sake of every woman in the kingdom, she kept herself holy. This is a high reason for being pure and good—the influence upon others. Christ Himself gave us this aim: “For their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth” (S. John xvii. 19).

None of us can be queens, none of us live in “the fierce light that beats upon a throne”; but in a smaller world we, too, can use the mighty power of influence. None of us can estimate the force of a true, pure life lived in a palace, a villa, a cottage, or a slum.

A wife. Each woman, when she marries, promises to obey her husband. In the East a woman was, and is, in bondage to her husband. Vashti, by one act, not only disobeyed her husband, but broke the iron bars of bondage, custom. She teaches us when only it is *right* thus to act. She shows us when a woman should be too good a wife to obey. It is when by obeying her husband she would disobey God’s laws. God gave to Vashti her womanly instincts; she would have done violence to these; and “because right is right,” she “followed right in scorn of consequence.”

Esther.

Read Esther iv. 10; v. 3; Hebrews xi. 25.



TIME of decision. Esther had to choose. Should her life be a life lived for self alone? Should she at this time throw over her God, His people, her own nation, her own relations, and thus save her own life? Save it? Rather waste it—the beautiful life God had given her—by simply existing, and enjoying the pleasures of sin for a season. It was a very easy thing to do, it only meant silence, letting things glide and take their own course. *Or*, should she own herself a servant of God, and choose to share the lot of His people, her own nation? Should she not do more, risk her one little life for the sake of the lives of all her nation? Here then was the time of a great decision. The purpose of her life was laid bare before her: “And who knoweth whether thou art not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?” Should she keep silent or should she face her greatest

peril? "If I perish, I perish." We know she did risk this danger. Let us see how she prepared for this decision. (1) She gave time for thought; (2) she kept her body in subjection by fasting, so that her spirit might not be ruled by it. At the end of three days her mind was clear and steady, her heart was fixed, her plans formed. "Strong in the strength which God supplies" she went forth, she crossed the threshold, she stood in her woman's defencelessness and in the superhuman strength of God before that dreaded monarch, and the sacrifice was made. God gave her back her purified earthly life, when that sceptre was held out, and she touched it.

And for us. Times come when we must face life, and sift its motive. We have to choose. Shall I make my life snug and easy-going? buy the clothes I like? go to music halls, dances, theatres? have my evenings out? "live," as people call it? make myself have a good time while I am young? Or shall I try to live for God? dare to own myself a Christian at my Confirmation? Shall I try to use my life and all its possessions for the sake of others, spread out my pleasures and all I have over their lives as well as my own?

We cannot leave this story without thinking of

the Presence of the King of kings. He holds out to us a golden sceptre, that we may live; "His Hands are stretched out still." He says to us, "Behold My Hands"—Hands that bear those glorious scars. He gives Himself to us and says, "Take, eat, this is My Body. Drink ye all of this, for this is My Blood." He is not waiting to be asked to our banquet. He has Himself provided a banquet for us. He will bring us, if we will let Him, into His Banqueting House, where His banner over us is Love (Cant. ii. 4).

How do we prepare to meet Him, our God, at His Feast? Do we, like Esther, give time for thought and preparation? Do we learn self-restraint? Do we come after prayer and fasting? Do we prepare our hearts and bodies for that Presence? Do we examine ourselves? (1 Cor. xi. 28).

"And for what do we make request?" Is it only of ourselves that we are thinking, when we come into His Presence? Have we no needs of others to plead? Do we identify ourselves with all God's people? Do we plead for the whole Church—militant, and at rest? There is no time more fitting for intercession than at the Eucharist.

"Then for those our dearest and our best,
By this prevailing Presence we appeal.
O fold them closer to Thy mercy's Breast,
O do Thine utmost for their souls' true weal!
From tainting mischief keep them white and clear,
And crown Thy gifts with strength to persevere."

Job's Wife.

Read Job ii. 1-11.



TO-DAY we read of a great crisis in a great life.

God is at work. God is working upon Job and proving him by suffering. Why? To make him really strong and great, to purify him as gold is purified of dross; to make him, as he became, a great masterpiece, from which many another life has copied. *We* "have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord." Looking on that life we can see the great end God had in view when He thus dealt with His servant (S. James v. 11). Satan is at work. The same troubles that came from God, Satan would use as his tools. By them he would drive the iron of bitterness into Job's soul; by them he would sever Job from his God, and make him lose his faith (verse 5).

This, then, is the crisis in Job's life. Was he

alone? Was there no human friend to help him in this time of need? Was there no one to keep his eye fixed beyond the present, to help him to see the end of God's ways? He was worse than alone; his wife, who should have been his help, *she* it is that sides with his deadly foe, and her mouth is used to repeat Satan's words, "Curse God, and die." She it was who tried, like Satan, to break down her husband's faith, and make him give up his trust in God.

How wonderful the answer to her words: "You are foolish," do you not know that evil (trouble, not sin) is a gift from my God? I am taking it from His Hand. "What, shall we receive good at the Hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?" (verse 10). The Hand that had given Job so many great blessings, is he fearful to receive from *that* Hand? (Heb. xii. 6).

How do we speak to those about us? Is it not often as "foolish women"? When others are in trouble, what help have our words then? Do we say, "I couldn't stand it; I should go mad if I were like you"? If it is trouble from others do we say, "I should not put up with it if I were you"? We may not know of the battle going on in another's soul between good and evil, light and darkness, but

these mighty struggles are going on all around us. How are our words being used? For God? Do we echo the good thoughts in another's nature? or are we the devil's mouthpiece? do we give shape and force to his cruel temptations?

But you say—I am sure I do not know how I can be used by God, I hate preaching at people, I like to be natural, and say what comes into my mind. Have you ever thought what is natural? If you are serving God, loving and trusting Him, the naturalness will be on God's side, and your thoughts and words, *by degrees*, will become those that God needs to help others. But if, like Job's wife, you lose faith in God, give up trust, give up love—how terrible is the thought—it will be natural for you to speak the devil's messages, use his words.

The Ideal Woman in the Old Testament.

Read Proverbs xxxi. 10-31.



E are told so much about her—every verse speaks to us—that we must arrange her life under heads.

1. What outsiders saw and knew of her life.
2. What her home people saw and knew.
3. What only God and His Angels saw and knew.

1. What outsiders saw and knew. *A strong healthy woman* (verse 17). *Well and suitably dressed* (verse 22). *A notable husband* (verse 23). *Happy children* (verse 28). *Wealth* (verses 16, 21, 22). Yet one who was *industrious*, not ashamed to earn money by honest toil (verses 13, 15, 19, 24). *A good head for business and home* (verses 16, 18, 26, 27). *A woman truly honourable and respected*, “her candle goeth not out by night”—Eastern sign of respectability—(verses 18, 23, 25). *A woman who considered others and was of kindly word*—“She spread out her hands to the needy” (verses 20, 26). This is what her

world saw — A happy, busy, prosperous, loveable woman.

2. What her home people saw and knew. They saw a great example *lived* before their eyes. No one watches us and knows us like those we live with. You know the saying, "No man is a hero to his valet." Day followed day, and the young wife became the mother, the young mistress became the elderly matron, and time was writing down the truth of that home life. Her kind words were not put on for show when visitors came, or broken by days of ill-temper. No, there was a *law* of kindness about her, something that went on and on, like the sun rising and setting. What did this true life beget? It brought forth the sweetest fruit—*trust* (verse 11) —*blessings of gratitude* (verse 28) — *true praise* (verse 28).

3. What only God and His Angels saw and knew. Why have I put this last? Is it of the least importance? It is the secret of what went before. You have a watch. I, as an outsider, can see that it is gold or silver, ornamented or plain. You, the owner, see its face, and learn to know its ways, and whether it keeps good time, and may be trusted. But the watchmaker, when he looks at it, sees much more—he sees what makes it right or wrong, he

sees the mainspring, and how that works. So God, when He looks at a life, sees what makes it true or false. He saw the spring of this woman's life—"a woman that feareth the Lord" (verse 30). Yes, she looked further than popularity, further than a husband's, or children's praise. She lived under the eye of God—reverenced Him, His Mind, His Will. This is what she feared. This is to be God-fearing.

But, you say—"Yes, it is all very nice, and like a story-book; perhaps if I had a good husband, and was well off, and plenty of servants, and a strong body, and good clothes, and was never starved or pinched by winter cold, I should find it pleasant to give to the poor, and to be busy, and it would be much easier to speak kindly." There is much truth in what you say, but not the whole truth. *Circumstances never make people holy.* It needs God's power to do that. *Each life has its own special temptations.* No, the secret of a real life is the same for all—rich, prosperous, strong, poor, unsuccessful, sick—"be thou in the fear of the Lord all the day long."

This woman is the Old Testament ideal, before Christ had lived His life on earth. Since then we Christians have a still grander ideal. Our ideal we find in 1 Cor. xiii.—not prosperity, nor freedom from trouble, pain, and want—but "Love, that beareth

all things, endureth all things," love, that suffers long, and is kind, etc. The life of Christ—this is our ideal—the life of sacrifice, the life of love. We would know "the love of Christ which passeth knowledge" (Eph. iii. 19).

The New Testament Characters.

Elizabeth, the Mother of the Forerunner of Christ.

Read S. Luke i. 5-25, 40-45.

IT has been said, and it is true, that great men have, for the most part, good mothers. S. Augustine, Wesley, Pusey (I am thinking specially of great religious reformers), these men had God-fearing mothers.

To-day we think of the Mother of John the Baptist, of whom Christ said that among those born of women none greater had arisen (S. Matt. xi. 11). In verse 6 we read of one leading a patient, persistent godly life, one whose life and profession matched God's law, who attended His service, sought supernatural help, and used it to live a supernatural life. This religion of hers was no phase of excitement, but something that went on and on, for we read of her "well-stricken in years."

When we look at her son, do we not find the same persistent, patient life? Think of those

many years of preparation in the desert (verse 80).

Verses 24, 25. God has called her—aged in body, but strong in spirit—to become a mother. How does she receive this holy calling? Does she gossip about it? No, it is far too great and lofty a calling. She shares it alone with God, she lives in retirement with her beautiful hope, treasuring the heavenly gift.

Look at her son, he, too, had a high calling (verses 14-16), the secret of which he shared alone with God, treasuring the heavenly gift in the desert until the time when he should tell forth the word of God (chap. iii. 2).

Verses 41-43. Elizabeth's life, alone with God, brought forth fruit—a new insight. Filled by the Holy Spirit, what did she see? A poor girl, her own cousin, travel-stained, weary, poorly clothed, standing on her threshold. Is this all? No. "The eyes of her heart being enlightened" (Eph. i. 18, R.V.), what did she see? what did she feel?—"Whence is this to me, that the Mother of my Lord should come to me?" She saw Christ, she felt His near Presence, and she was filled with deep reverence and deep joy. Hers was the first human voice to break the silence of the ages, and tell the world that Christ had come. Her spirit seemed imparted to her unborn child; it, too, before its life could

utter a sound, was moved at the Presence of the Lord (verse 41).

Now look at the life of her son. What did those long years alone with God bring to him? "The eyes of his heart were enlightened." What did he see? A poor Man, his cousin, walking with poor men, a carpenter by trade. Is this all he saw? No, this is what he saw—"Behold the Lamb of God, Which taketh away the sin of the world" (S. John i. 28, 29). His mother's voice was the first human voice to proclaim Christ; he chose to be nothing but a voice, to tell the same great truth: "I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord" (S. John i. 23). And, like his mother, when she felt the nearness of Christ's Presence, he felt his unworthiness, and said, "Whose shoe's latchet I am not worthy to unloose" (S. John i. 27).

And for ourselves. First we learn the deep mystery of motherhood. According to what a woman is, in soul, as well as body, her child will be the richer or the poorer in its start in life. O! how terrible does this make the sin of an unholy motherhood! And what a beautiful motive it is for a God-like life. Can it be said of all motherhood, "The Lord hath dealt with me"? But above all

we learn something of what Christ's Presence is. Do we ever discern it? How do we come to the Blessed Sacrament? "Have the eyes of our hearts ever been enlightened" by prayer and quiet communing with God? What do we see? Plain Bread broken? Wine poured out? Is this all we see? No, much more, "Behold the Lamb of God, Which taketh away the sin of the world," and when we have seen that Blessed Presence, then we learn to say, "Whence is this to me that my Lord should come to me?" We say, "I am not worthy so much as to gather up the crumbs under Thy table."

Anna.

Read S. Luke ii. 26-38.



VERSE 38. "She coming in at that instant." What moment was that? It was *the moment* of Anna's life. It was the event towards which her whole life had been leading. A far greater day it was than her wedding day, though doubtless that had been a day of great ceremony and rejoicing, when she had heard, from her bridal chamber, the cry, "Behold the bridegroom cometh," and her bridesmaids had gone out to meet him. A far greater sight, full of awe and mystery, she saw at that moment, than she had ever seen before, though, we may suppose, she had seen her husband die.

What did she see? She saw an Infant, in the arms of an old man. The young Mother standing by, come there to redeem her firstborn. So poor, she could but bring the offering of the poor, she could not afford a lamb. It was no extraordinary sight—for every mother brought her firstborn. It

all looked much as usual in the Temple that day. Yes to the eyes of flesh ; but what to the eyes of the spirit ?—to eyes that had been opened, and trained to see, by prayer and fasting ? What did such eyes see ? What did the aged Simeon and the aged Anna see—dim though their natural sight might be ? They saw the “ Lord of glory.” They saw God’s salvation. They saw the “ great mystery of godliness—God manifested in the flesh” (Mal. iii. 1 ; S. Luke ii. 30 ; 1 Tim. iii. 16).

And now let us ask ourselves, Should I have seen what Anna saw ? Should I have come in at all ? What brought her there ? Can it be true that there are things to be seen that I cannot see ? Am I blind ?

Anna had a clearer, truer sight than ours. *Her spirit could see.* Why ? Because it was growing more alive, happier, brighter. No longer did her body rule it. Her spirit had long been master and kept under the body. It had taken the reins, and was ruling the whole of Anna’s nature. We know the cause of its secret growth—*Prayer and Fasting.* Prayer—the soul meeting God. Fasting—the body ruled for God. The path of this just life was shining more and more unto perfect day, when God’s servant would look face to face upon the Light of the World.

Can anything so beautiful happen now? Can I have my spirit really reigning over my lower nature? Can I walk nearer and nearer into the Light unto the perfect day? Yes, it can be really true now.

Prayer. What is prayer? "My soul hangeth upon God"—that is prayer. It is the cry of the soul to God, as a child cries to its mother. It is the soul taking in the breath of Heaven and living in that pure air. It is the soul's necessity, as much as air for the body. *Fasting.* What is fasting? It is the spirit ruling the body. Do you mean to say that going without food, or abstaining from meat or giving up eating sweets, or taking the least inviting food at table, or not being the one to have the most comfortable chair in the room and nearest the fire, or not sleeping so long in the morning, and being careful to keep my body clean, these things have anything to do with my spirit, that such things could help my spirit eyes to get wider opened? *Yes, I do.* For think, is it the body that urges you to do this? Is it not the spirit making a few rules for the body, so that it shall not grow masterful and *always have what it likes*? Is it not that the body may learn to know it is joined to a higher nature which must grow?

We have begun Lent. For forty days God, as

Man, made His holy body to fast—this alone should be enough for us. God, as Man, spent long nights in prayer—this alone should be a sufficient proof of the need for prayer. To-day's lesson on Anna makes us see the reason. It is that we may have those blessed spirit eyes which *see*. Think what our Easter Communion might be! We might, with our spirit eyes, see what Anna and Simeon saw. We, too, might sing, "For mine eyes have seen Thy salvation."

The Woman of Samaria (1).

Read S. John iv. 1-42.



THE lesson to-day is of great importance to us, it tells us how God would win a woman's heart and nature — a sinful woman's heart and nature—to Himself. The seven last words of Jesus upon the Cross, how we prize them! We women should prize the seven words spoken to the Woman of Samaria, and learn how Jesus would educate a woman's soul.

1. "*Give Me to drink.*" The tired, weary Stranger speaks to the alien, the outcast, the woman. Such simple words they seem to us, but thought will show us that this request is full of meaning and significance. A Jew ask for a favour from a Samaritan! Why, all the stiff rules of caste are disregarded. The woman herself felt this (verse 9). "His disciples marvelled that He talked with the woman," whose very manner must have betrayed her bold, bad life (verse 27). Would not avoidance of her be

the moral discipline she needed most? Yet those simple words broke the frigid barrier of human custom, spanned the awful gulf self-made by sin, and went straight in their appeal to the woman's nature.

And does not this first word speak specially to our woman's nature? Who raises the barriers of caste and class, so that one set of people have no friendly dealings with another set of people? Is it not specially woman's work? A man does not see the petty distinctions between people who have one servant and others who do their own work; or between two sisters—one in service, who is called plain "Mary," and wears a cap, and says, "Yes, ma'am," when speaking of her mistress, and her sister behind a counter, who is spoken of as "a young lady in business," and is "Miss Smith," not simply "Jane Smith." These distinctions—social barriers—are principally made by women. Let us remember, when we are tempted to raise them, how unlike Christ we shall become. He knows not of them, He looks only at the heart. But that other barrier, that real, not artificial, barrier between the clean and the unclean, the fallen woman and the pure woman—should we not recognize it? Should we not marvel at any friendly intercourse? "Give

Me to drink." Surely the asking a favour should come from the outcast. There is a barrier—the barrier is an awful chasm—between the impure and the pure, between virtue and vice. None other eyes could ever dare to look so far across, or could ever see the depth of that dread abyss, as could the eyes of the Son of God; He only knew what was perfect holiness; He felt all the awfulness of sin far more than the best human moral nature can feel it. Jesus did not ignore it. We shall see by other of His words that He would not have it hidden, but Jesus, the Good Shepherd, would *restore* each soul (Psalm xxiii. 1, 2). His own would He bring again from the depths. The deep of that awful abyss called to the depths of His great Love, and "Love"—God—"never faileth." Let us learn, then, from Him how He would restore a soul. "Give Me to drink." Jesus was really weary. These words appealed to the woman in that woman, the germ of motherhood, we may call it, that God has placed in our natures, the power of caring for, and tending, the helpless, the weak, the feeble, or the needy. Jesus spoke to that better nature, and by those first words *He restored self-respect*. In other words, out of the awful wreckage He shewed what could be saved, that all was not lost.

But perhaps we are thinking this afternoon—It is not for us to speak as though we would restore a soul. Look at our own lives. Some of us have fallen in our own sight very low, some of us feel very truly how terribly different we are to an innocent child. Shall we not, then, as we look at this lesson, say, each one to herself—So would Jesus restore my soul? He would restore self-respect, “He hath made us, and not we ourselves,” “He knows what is in man” (S. John ii. 24, 25). He tells you and me, as well as the Woman of Samaria, that He sees that better nature that we should respect, that it is not wholly lost and ruined, and that *He* has need of it.

The Woman of Samaria (2).

Read S. John vi. 1-49.



LAST Sunday we spoke of the seven words of Jesus that He addressed to this woman; and we had but time to think of the first. From these words we are trying to learn how Jesus would restore a soul. We have seen that He spoke to what was best in the woman—He asked help from her. To-day we will follow the other six words, and we shall learn to understand their order.

2. "Jesus said unto her: If thou knewest the gift of God, and Who it is that saith to thee, Give Me to drink, thou wouldest have asked of Him, and He would have given thee living water" (verse 10). By these words Jesus would *restore to the soul a sense of its need of God*. He appealed to that which cannot be explained away—the fact that the soul of man does feel after God. Jesus spoke of it as a fact. "If thou knewest, thou wouldest have asked." The savage has that response within him, and if

he only knew Who it was Who spoke to him—

“In the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean, and the living air,
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man”—

he would indeed lift up hands in prayer, that he too might be filled with His Spirit. It was Jesus, “the express image of God’s Person,” Who spoke those words to that woman of Samaria, and she, when she looked upon that Face and saw those Eyes upon her, received a revelation of God, far deeper and far holier, far more divine, than nature ever can reveal, for she, like ourselves, entered upon “these last days in which God hath spoken unto us by His Son” (Heb. i. 1-14). And if the need of God is felt when man is alone with nature, what needs are awakened when we look at the Life, the Death, the Love of Jesus?—then we may begin to understand the words of S. Augustine: “Thou madest me for Thyself, and my heart is restless till it find rest in Thee.”

3. “Jesus answered and said unto her, Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again, but whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up unto

everlasting life" (verses 13, 14). By these words Jesus would restore to the soul that has a glimmer of its value, and that cries after God, *the power to return to God*. "The water that I shall give him"—what is it but the supernatural lifting above the natural? Something—say rather *Someone* (for we need not doubt that the living water is the Spirit of the living God, S. John vii. 39)—coming into our fallen, weak nature to restore life, and force, and will, to raise us up to everlasting life. Is not this power to return to God?

4. "Jesus said unto her, Go, call thy husband, and come hither" (verse 16). Jesus restores to the *soul the conviction of sin*. To be healed and restored to health means getting rid of the evil as well as strengthening flagging life. For a true restoration there must be no hiding of the past, no keeping back of disagreeable facts, no continuation of habits that cause disease. True conversion is that which makes the soul look its sins in the face. This woman may have forgotten who she was, so wonderful were the new thoughts pressing upon her. But at that word "husband," what a rush of past, defiling memories came upon her! it was not just *a* woman to be restored to holiness, to God, but I myself, with all my past, I, *the sinner*. This is what you and I

must see, and then, as with this woman, confession must follow. "I have no husband"; she dared not own herself by the honoured name of wife.

5. "Jesus said unto her, Thou hast well said I have no husband, for thou hast had five husbands, and he whom thou now hast is not thy husband, in that saidst thou truly" (verse 18). By these plain words Jesus *restores to the soul the conviction of righteousness and judgment*. Think what it means. Not only may the restored soul see something of its value, may awaken to feel the need of God, and see the source of power and life, and face its past sins, but it may also see what is pure and right, and what is foul and black, see right from wrong, gain a moral insight, see righteousness and judgment.

6. "Jesus saith unto her, Woman, believe Me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain nor yet at Jerusalem worship the Father. Ye worship ye know not what : we know what we worship : for salvation is of the Jews. But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth : for the Father seeketh such to worship Him. God is a Spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth" (verses 21-24). *Jesus restores to the soul an insight as to the nature of God—*

His Fatherhood, His Being (God is a Spirit)—and therefore how the soul should approach Him (with the heart and spirit of a son). God seeks such to worship Him, in the truest and most real worship of their whole natures.

7. "Jesus saith unto her, I that speak unto thee am He" (verse 26). Then *Jesus restores the soul to God*. Do we ask, like Philip, "Shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us"? To us the answer comes—"He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father, how sayest thou then, Shew us the Father?" (S. John xiv. 8, 9). What about our communions? are they so real to us that our souls are restored to God?

The Widow of Nain.

Read S. Luke vii. 11-17.

IN taking this lesson to-day, we will not (though it would seem the chief subject of this story) turn our thoughts to the son—his early death and wonderful resurrection; but to the mother, and to the fact that when Jesus saw her, “He was moved with compassion.” Two lessons come to us when we think of the widow of Nain: 1. The reality of sorrow. 2. The mystery of sorrow.

1. The reality of her sorrow. She really loved, therefore she really grieved. So true was her sorrow, it called forth the true sympathy of God Incarnate. Those tears she was shedding spoke of a stricken heart. They were not sensational or hysterical, but tears that moved the strong sympathy of Jesus. There was power in the sympathy of Jesus, it was comfort in its fullest meaning—“encouragement.” There was that in His voice which

made His command, "Weep not," possible. His is ever a sympathy that acts. He loves in *deed* and in truth. "He came nigh and touched the bier." He said, "Young man, I say unto thee, Arise, and he that was dead sat up, and He gave him to his mother" (R.V.).

What about our sorrows? Do we truly love? When death or grief enter our homes, what realities are quickened into life? Would Jesus have to say of our grief, "Why make ye this ado?"—that noisy crying—those loud hysterical voices—that fussing over deepness of crape! Is this the tumult that we raise, and that Jesus would "put forth"? Does this speak of deep sorrow and deep love? Would Jesus always be moved with compassion at our funerals, or when our grief is loudest? Let us ask ourselves—Is the tie of blood very real to me? Do I really love my father or mother, sisters or brothers? Is my home-love real? Let us remember this story is about real grief and real compassion. Has this grief been ours? Some day we may be called to leave the city "pleasant" (Nain means pleasant), and carry forth to its burial all that made that pleasant place bright and fair. Now, as then, our sorrow can bring us face to face with Jesus. He now draws nigh, and touches our loss, our grief. His comfort is ever as

real, "Weep not," for He now, as then, sees the farther shore of sorrow, and the moment when our sorrow shall be turned into joy. There was a time of suspense for that mother when the bearers "stood still." To us now our waiting time may seem long, but, when we measure time by eternity, it will seem "but for a moment."

2. The mystery of sorrow. Why that loss of the son? why that anguish for the mother? One answer is sufficient—it brought her face to face with God. She really learnt what it was to have the eyes of God over her—eyes full of compassion. Do you think her after life ever looked the same? When she ground the corn, or swept the house, or boiled the rice, and lived her humble household life, would any of these things look the same? No, there would be a joy within her that would throw a brightness upon all things, a joy that nothing could destroy. It is to be found in the words, "They looked unto Him and were lightened, and their faces were not ashamed."

This is the purpose of sorrow to all lives—a special meeting place with God. Then He speaks to us, "as a man speaketh to his friend face to face." Sorrow is the lesson-book God puts into our hands. There we spell out the meaning of patience, forbear-

ance, long-suffering, meekness, gentleness, self-sacrifice. Yes, and honour, loyalty, reverence, justice. Through it we can understand God, "Who is strong and patient," God, "Who in that He suffered being tempted is able to succour them that are tempted."

The Woman who was a Sinner.

Read S. Luke vii. 36-50.

THREE characters are brought before us in this lesson, and each throws light upon the other. 1. The perfectly Pure, Holy, Spotless Man, Jesus Christ, the Lord (1 S. Peter ii. 21, 22). 2. The outwardly-correct Pharisee, who wished to be known as a religious man. 3. The openly-shamed woman known as a sinner.

To-day our special attention is turned towards the last of these three characters, the woman of the city, who was known as a sinner. Let us remember we are not thinking about these bad women as a class, but of one of them who really wished to come where Jesus was (verse 37), whose passionate power of love and devotion had at last found its Object—God; she really “turned from idols to serve the living and true God” (1 Thess. i. 9); “she loved much,” and expressed that love in deed. The spikenard, the feet bathed with tears, and wiped

with hair, each act was but the expression of true love (verses 44-47).

Let us now recall this scene in the Pharisee's house. There, in the presence of God manifest in the flesh, we see two souls—those of the Pharisee and the woman who was a sinner—and more than this, we are made to see what God saw in them. Both had a record. The recording Angel had noted in God's Book their past. To the people of his day the Pharisee passed for a righteous, moral man; in God's Book there stood a debt owed to God he could in nowise pay, and for which he needed as frank forgiveness as any fellow-debtor (verses 41, 42).

In the city, and wherever she went (into the Pharisee's house, for instance), the woman who stood in the presence of Jesus was known as a fallen woman, a sinner. In God's Book the long, black record stood, which marked still more strongly, in her case, the hopelessness of repayment, and the need of forgiveness. Both souls had received from God, and squandered that which they had received. They could in nowise repay or re-gather that which had not been theirs, but God's, and which they had spent and scattered. That woman was once pure, this purity was from God. What had she done with it? Now that she stood before God, could He

behold it? No, it was gone. That Pharisee had once the childlike nature, willing to learn from others, diffident of itself—where is it now? Can we discover it when he speaks to his Divine Guest? He actually thinks he knows more than Christ (verse 39). Where is the humility of childhood that came from God? Gone. Thus these two souls stand before us; both are debtors which cannot pay, cannot restore.

And then for a moment we are allowed to see the desire of Jesus for these souls. He Whom they have robbed, He Whom they have defrauded, He Whose mercy is so great that He frankly forgives them both, He has one thing that He desires—it is their *love*. Now is it that the sinner and the righteous professor change places, and the “last is first, and the first last” (S. Luke xiii. 30). Jesus saw her many sins, and He saw she loved much. What does this mean? It means that it was not half a heart that turned to Him in its speechless gratitude, but an entire offering, an entire surrender. This was a soul to whom God could declare, “Thy sins are forgiven, thy faith hath saved thee, go ‘into’ peace.” For it was real repentance, which forsakes sin, and wholly turns to God. How could such words be said to half-hearted love, that goes not

wholly after God—to the Pharisee, who loved but little?

And for ourselves. Never let us gather from this history that if we sin much we shall love much, that it does not matter if we go on leading a sinful life so long as we some day turn round and—What were you going to say? You know what it was—“and do better.” You know you could not have said, “and love much.” You know love has nothing to do with arrangements and calculating bargains, that it cannot be manufactured when wanted. You cannot deceive yourselves that such plans had been tried by this woman, that she had made such calculations. We cannot tell when it was that she came under the influence of God’s Voice, God’s Presence, when she first met Jesus Christ, the Lord. But we do know her heart responded, that she came where Jesus was, that she loved much. We may be in our own sight much more respectable than this woman; yet we may take very easily our debts owed to God. What are we doing with our womanhood, our womanly instincts? How are we spending these things? Are they becoming more beautiful, and making other lives *better*? Or are they leaving us? are we dragging them through the mire of selfishness, defacing, soiling, ruining them? What do we think of such

debts as these? Do they sit lightly on our conscience? Know, then, we do not really hate sin, we do not really love God with a whole heart, that such words are *not* for us—"Thy sins are forgiven thee, go in peace."

But before we leave this history we would store one more lesson. Would we, if we could, be freed from sin? Do we long to love as this woman loved? to come into the Presence of Jesus? Are we asking, "Oh that I knew where I might find Him"? (Job xxiii. 3). I would go anywhere, face any ordeal, if I could but hear Him say, "Thy sins are forgiven thee, go in peace." There have been many ways of finding Him—such awful ways some have been—think of the thief upon the cross; his crucifixion brought him to Jesus. But do you ask me that question? I am not afraid to answer. Jesus is in His Church, He is in His Sacraments, He is with His Priesthood. In the hour of your confession you can find Him. In this nineteenth century Jesus still has power on earth to forgive sins; He says as really to you as to that woman, by the voice of His minister, "Thy sins are forgiven thee, go in peace."

The Woman who touched Christ's Garment.

Read S. Mark v. 24-34.

THRONGS were touching Christ at that hour, it was a press of people. But what made the touch of this poor woman so different, and brought such a different result? She touched with a purpose. She had a great distress, and she knew it. She knew in Whom she was putting her trust, and was confident.

Her purpose was to be whole of her plague. Her distress was a terrible sickness (verse 28). Her trust was "God manifest in the Flesh."

There is very deep teaching for us in this story, and it will help us to come rightly to our Easter Communion.

We believe that in the Blessed Sacrament Christ is as really present to-day as He was to that thronging crowd. We believe that that garment which wrapt His Blessed Presence was to that woman a sacrament;

it was to her an outward and visible sign of His Presence, His Almightyness, and, in using it rightly, it was the *means whereby she received of Christ*. She came in lowly faith in her time of need with a direct purpose, she touched that simple garment, with nothing specially grand about it, a common earthly thing. But she, in a true sense, "discerned the Lord's Body," through the sign she saw the Thing signified. And we know what happened. Virtue went out of Christ. It penetrated her whole being, it woke up health, and dispersed disease, and she knew that she was whole. And was that all? No; she, fearing and trembling, acknowledged His Presence and Its power, she gained the blessing of peace. The peace of God rested upon her, and it passed all understanding.

Now for ourselves. What are our Communion to us? Do we see through the sign the Thing signified? How do we receive God's creatures of Bread and Wine? Do we believe that as truly as Christ was present beneath that garment, so now, under the forms of Bread and Wine, He is verily and indeed taken, and received by the faithful?

Do you think it was the woman's faith that made Him present, and that if we have faith He will be present to us, but to those who have not faith the

Bread and Wine are nothing but bread and wine? No, Jesus was just as present to *all* the pushing crowd, some may have actually trodden upon that sacred garment, and touched it again and again (S. Luke viii. 45).

It is not our faith that makes Him come among us. His great love is always preventing us; but only the faithful, who come with the sense of need and desire of healing, receive the blessing of that Presence. How sad to think, then, we may even "press with our teeth" the sign of so great a Thing, and not discerning His Presence, *which is there*, we may only eat and drink judgment to ourselves (1 Cor. xi. 23-30).

And would you think it strange that this woman should love to come again into Christ's Presence, that she should come not always to receive from Him, not always to touch Him, but to show her adoration, her love, her gratitude, to worship Him? And why is it strange that the communicant who in the early service has received virtue from Him—life in all its fulness—should again seek His Presence at the beautiful mid-day Eucharistic Service, and there adore Him, praise Him, bless Him, and go back to daily life with the message of peace?

Shall we, then, this Easter seek Jesus, and come

to Him with a purpose? Shall our weakness lay hold upon His strength? Shall we rise up from our Communion filled with a new life, new power, new hopes? Shall we carry back to our daily life His message of peace—the peace of God which passeth all understanding?

The Daughter of Jairus.

(EASTER DAY.)

Read S. Mark v. 22-24, 35-48; Philippians iii. 10.



WE know nothing of her character, we only know of one great event in her life—*she really died*, and then, life took hold of death (verse 41). Life spoke to life, and made that weak human soul so strong that it received power from that very command—power itself to struggle with that dead body, and once again assert the power of spirit. “Straightway the damsel arose and walked.”

What do we learn from this? 1. We learn the mighty power of the living God—it cannot be holden by death, death must give way. 2. We learn the existence—yes, and the nearness—of the spirit of man after death. When Jesus spoke, He spoke to a living soul. When He spoke to that young girl with His calm, human voice, how different was it to the “tumult,” “the great wailing.” Jesus did

not speak to a deaf, unconscious being, in a state of coma, or sleep. No, each time that Jesus raised the dead He did not address death as if it were some dreadful king of shades, a personality, as the Greeks thought. But He spoke face to face with the immortal soul that had left its earthly house. "Young man" — "Lazarus" — "Damsel." And there was such power, such hope, such encouragement, in that Blessed Voice, that the freed spirit could not but listen and obey, and from that very command receive strength to once more inhabit the earthly house.

To-day is Easter Day, and we are thinking of the power of His Resurrection. How was it, you ask, that this young girl, the son of the widow of Nain, Lazarus—that these were not the first-fruits from the dead? was not their resurrection before the Resurrection of Christ? and yet we sing of Christ as "the first-fruits of them that slept." How is this? Here is the answer. Christ's Body rose to die no more—"I am He that liveth and was dead, and behold I am alive for evermore" (Rev. i. 18). Christ's Resurrection was not the bringing back to life of a mortal body: it was an entire Resurrection. His Blessed Body had been sown a natural Body, and was raised a "spirit" Body. The living, quick-

ening spirit of God was in It, and all that was mortal was swallowed up in immortality. This was the power of Christ's Resurrection.

Here is the Fountain of Life, here the Power of an endless life—Christ. He has proved His power. "I have power," He said, "to lay down My life, and I have power to take it again." Only get in touch with That Mighty Power, and we know, "In Christ all shall be made alive." He has given us one clear, plain way—"He that eateth My Flesh, and drinketh My Blood, hath eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day" (S. John vi. 53, 54).

Let us remember, then, when we say, "I believe in the Resurrection of the Body," that we mean much more than to be like Jairus' daughter, who took again her mortal body, so subject to earth that Jesus "commanded that something should be given to her to eat." Yes, we believe, as we say, in this Confession, in the immortality of the body as well as of the soul. We believe the Living Power of God can be in it, that it can hold the germ-seeds of immortality in it. We believe, as we receive the Blessed Sacrament, in those words, "Preserve *thy body* and soul unto everlasting life."

Is our faith staggered when we think of the "dust to dust," of corruption, of those eaten by wild

animals, or burnt, or buried in the deep sea, of the ceaseless rotation of matter, so that the very corn that gives us the bread we eat may grow out of ground that is partly made of human dust, even as two poets have said of the very flowers and mosses we see about us—

“And from his ashes may be made
The violet of his native land.”

Tennyson.

“Body hides where?
Ferns of all feather, mosses and heather;
Yours be the care.”

Browning.

Do these things stagger us? Let us look them in the face. What is the first lesson they teach us? Is it not that we know nothing of annihilation? That nothing, not even a grain of dust, can escape from the laws of God. If it goes down to the depths of the sea, God's laws are there; if it ascends up into the highest ether, His laws are there also. And if this is true of all the dust of the earth, even the pollen dust of flowers, what must be the safety of that human dust which contains the germ of immortality? Think how safe its keeping in God's Hands, “Who comprehendeth the dust of the earth in a measure, Who taketh up the isles as a very little

thing" (Isa. xl. 12-15). True though it is, that that which is "sown is not the body that shall be" (it is not so with any seed), yet still more true is it that *out of it* the spiritual body will come forth. Then shall be brought to pass the saying, "Death is swallowed up in victory" (1 Cor. xv. 37, 54).

The Woman taken in Adultery.

Read S. John viii. 3-11.



AS in the history of the woman who was a sinner, so in this story all our interest is centred upon three characters—*personæ* we may call them. 1. The Lord Jesus Christ, the Holy One, the Saviour and Redeemer of men. 2. The outwardly moral law-abiding man, represented by the Scribes and Pharisees. 3. The criminal, represented by the woman taken in adultery.

There are three ways of treating sinners. 1. To be *insensible* as to the shame of sin. This is the way of vice, it is the criminal's way, it is the way of those who are morally weak. It is only too true that the sense of sin can be lost. The poor woman, whose history is now before us, must have lost this moral fibre, must have become morally weak. Probably, too, she lived amongst those who were lost to a sense of shame and sin, no one of her set cared

to accuse her. 2. To make a wide distinction between the virtuous and the vicious, between the man who outwardly keeps the law, and the criminal. That the distinction shall be that the virtuous shall hate the vicious. That the man who outwardly keeps the law should mete out vengeance upon the criminal. This was the way of the Scribes and Pharisees in this history. They cried for vengeance. There was almost an exultation in their accusation; they seemed glad to inform Christ that there was no possibility of mistake (verse 4). They seemed nothing loth to drag a human being—and that human being a helpless, defenceless woman—into public, and to set her “in the midst.” Not one shred of pity, or sense of a common brotherhood, belonged to them. 3. To shew *mercy*—that is, “pity and disapprobation mixed.” Mercy is the highest quality of justice, for it can see the side of both the injured and the injurer. It can have such perfect sympathy that it can put itself not only in the place of the one who has been wronged—as the indignant law-abiding man can so easily do—but also in the place of the wrong-doer, the sinner; it can understand all the misery of his state. This is what Christ, the Saviour of sinners, did that day when He and that sinful woman met. He exercised the law of mercy

when He pronounced that sentence, "Neither do I condemn thee; go, and sin no more." In Him "mercy and truth met together," were perfectly one.

How do I look on *sin*? Am I insensible of its shame, its degradation, its awfulness? or is there only a feeling of indignation when others do wrong? Is there a moral want in my nature, a light feeling when I look at sin? Does it seem far more serious for me to lose my hands or my feet, or even the sight of my eyes, than to sin, and by sinning to deaden the powers of progress, of mind grasp, of insight in spiritual things? Do I use this story as a cloak for my insensibility *to sin*? Do I dare to say Christ felt less repugnance, less hatred of sin, than those Scribes and Pharisees—He Who felt so deeply its dreadfulness that He not only had grief of mind for the injured, but also for the one who had done the wrong? Was *this* insensibility to sin? Was it not seeing sin in its entirety, seeing *all* its ravages?

Though we may not have sinned as this woman had sinned, yet we have sinned, we have done amiss. This history speaks to us. It is a Divine message of hope; it tells us we can forsake sin, be freed from sin. Christ, in that command, "Go, and sin no more," told that poor woman of a glorious possi-

bility, namely, that from that time she could repent—that is, forsake sin. Those words were not a mockery. Shall we not believe in the hopefulness of Jesus for ourselves? It was possible for that woman, it is possible for us. A command from God is the promise of power from God (Isa. lv. 7).

The Woman bowed down by Satan.

Read S. Luke xiii. 10-18.



SEE this poor, bent cripple! "In nowise could she lift up herself." She could not look up at the blue sky, and realize the infinite beyond. No, she looks down—her eyes are ever bent earthwards. She must have seen so plainly all the dust and dirt of life's way—all the refuse, all the rubbish, all the waste, all soiled and weary feet, and we feel there would be small wonder if her spirit were bowed down to earth, as well as her body. Have we ever thought of what we see when we look down, not up? We are told of this woman's disease "as a spirit of infirmity," or again, she is spoken of as "a woman whom Satan had bound." This story brings us to face these questions—Who is Satan? What is his power? How can he be conquered?

1. Who is Satan? Satan means adversary—"Our adversary the devil" (1 S. Peter v. 8). The devil is a

person. Our Blessed Lord speaks of him as the "Prince of this world" (S. John xiv. 30); as "the Evil One" in the Lord's Prayer. S. Paul, by the Holy Spirit, calls him "The god of this world" (2 Cor. iv. 44); "the Prince of the power of the air" (Eph. ii. 2). Michael the Archangel contended with him (Jude 9). From these passages we cannot but learn that the devil is a person, and one who has some power over this world and its elements, and that he is man's special enemy, adversary. Then, if we look at our Prayer Books, that is, if we look at the teaching of the Church, we find it is the same as Holy Scripture. Each child is taught that he must renounce the devil and all his works. The season of Lent is the Church's testimony to the existence of the devil. For does she not then keep in memory each hour of that terrible struggle between light and darkness, when Christ was tempted of the devil? (S. Luke iv.). "Tempted in all points as we are, yet without sin" (Heb. iv. 15).

But some will say—Why should I believe that there is such a being as the devil? It is not an article of the Creed; I am not taught to say, I believe in the devil. This is no good argument. You forget that in the Creed you do say, "I believe in Jesus Christ. I believe in the Holy Catholic

Church." We have just seen how plainly both our Blessed Lord and His Church teach that there is a being, the devil. But apart from this clear answer, your argument is not a good one. You do not say in the Creed—I believe in my own personality, the spirit within me, that is *I*. Do you therefore doubt or deny your own individuality, your inner consciousness? But—you say—I can prove my personality by what it does. I can show you examples of influence upon other lives. I am glad you say this. Can you not also see what the devil does? Can you not also feel his influence within you?—that evil thought, that tempting suggestion, where did it come from? Look at that haggard, wicked, miserable face, it was once the innocent face of a little child. We know of this power of the devil, for we can see what he does.

2. But our lesson to-day leads us to that other question—What is Satan's power? That he has power over the world we can learn from the fact that our Lord did not disallow his claim (S. Luke iv. 6). That his power is the power of temptation we can have no doubt. As our adversary, this is his special way of trying to work our ruin. This is how he would sift us as wheat, hoping that he might get us (S. Luke xxii. 31, 32). This is how he goes about

when he would devour us. He is full of devices (2 Cor. ii. 11), very subtle (Rev. ii. 24). He tempts in so many different ways that it is difficult sometimes to be aware of his work. Sometimes he seems as an angel of light, and even spiritual and sacred things can be used as a temptation. Sometimes he uses physical things, such as sickness, "a spirit of infirmity," a thorn in the flesh (2 Cor. xii. 7), or he may rob us of our reason (S. Luke viii. 27-29). This is indeed a terrible trial of our faith. Let us not stop here. It has been right to face these things. Thank God, temptation need not mean yielding.

3. *How can Satan be conquered?* We have seen very plainly he is a strong man armed, and can use most things as his weapons (S. Luke xi. 22). Now we are to see through this story, and through many another in the Gospels, and through the lives of all saints, that a Stronger than Satan has come to spoil his goods. Christ has been "manifested that He might destroy the works of the devil" (Heb. ii. 14, 15). Not only by His Death and Resurrection, by His forty days and forty nights' battle and victory, has He proved His power over the devil, but now, by *each* battle fought and won by a Christian of to-day, who has put to proof the command, "Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might,"

Christ's power is manifested, the devil is mastered. Christ can, with the temptation that assails us, "make a way to escape that we may be able to bear it" (1 Cor. x. 13).

Let us then take courage from this history of the woman bowed down by Satan. God can lay His Hand upon us. Is it some evil habit that ties us down, that drags us down? Has it lasted many years?—eighteen years?—what a binding! We, too, can be loosed—"loosed on earth"—if we will but seek Jesus where He is; for Christ is in His Church. By His Sacraments He is with us still. We can be so surrounded by His protection that that wicked one cannot touch us.

Martha of Bethany.

Read S. Luke x. 38-42; S. John xi. 20, 28, 39.



AS we study this character let us keep in mind two things:—(1) that of Martha it was specially said that Jesus loved her—“Now Jesus loved Martha” (S. John xi. 5); (2) that she and her family owned Christ as their Master—“The Master is come” (S. John xi. 28).

As we consider Martha's character three special traits seem impressed upon us—her activity, her sincerity, her faith. If we think of her activity we see it very specially that day when Jesus came to her house and sought hospitality. We can imagine the eager readiness on her side to “receive Him into her house” (S. Luke x. 38). We can almost feel the bustle and hurry that then began, the much service, so that all should be at its very best. Can we not fancy the much running to and fro, the fetching and the carrying? We can recognize the same active spirit when the stillness of death was in her home.

Of Martha we read, "As soon as she heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met Him"; whilst Mary "sat still in the house," waiting for the Master's call. Let us remember Jesus loved this active character. He loved Martha as well as her sister. But an active temperament has its special temptations. There are very easy gradations from being busy to being in a bustle, and from being in a bustle to being cross and irritable. Then petulant words are spoken, someone is blamed, self-control is lost, and time for recollection, which would have calmed and directed this earnest activity, has been misspent. Martha yielded to these temptations. She, who so eagerly longed to serve Him Whom they knew and loved as Master, she so raised the dust and din of bustle and of worry, was so careful and cumbered, that patience was exhausted, irritable and petulant words were spoken, which cast blame not only upon her sister, but upon her Divine Guest, the Master for Whom she had meant to work so actively and with such zeal. How wrong it had all got. The motive had been so good, the desire so genuine, where was the mistake? Jesus understood it all. He saw where the mistake had arisen. "Martha, Martha, you are careful and worried *about much serving*. You have looked away from the object of your service, your Master Who is

so near, within your very house. He has been there, yet your mind has been fixed on your work for Him, not on Him. The one thing needful for you is to possess God, to love Him with all your heart and mind and soul and strength (S. Mark xii. 29-33). Mary had chosen that good part."

But you will say—What does this mean for us? This is something of its meaning. Life is a great work, there *is* much to be done; sometimes one gets lost among its endless duties and claims. You tell me you have such a busy life, that it is a ceaseless round of work, and you do not see how you can alter it, or make things different. I would ask you—What is the object of your work? Is it for money? Is it the work itself which has become an end? Or is it God? God may be the centre of your life—He was to Mary. Jesus, when He spoke to Martha, did not mean, give up baking and boiling, cooking and cleaning, or doing laundry work, but He did mean, put God first. He meant, go to these things after you have knelt at His feet in prayer.

But we must not finish our study of Martha without also considering her sincerity and faith. Every word she speaks is the word of a sincere nature. She said what she really thought. Jesus loved Martha, He loved the sincere nature. But this trait

in her character had its special temptations. Very truthful people often fail to make truth attractive by their bluntness and want of tact. They do not understand "speaking the truth in love" (Eph. iv. 15). Martha yielded to this temptation. We feel the bluntness—"Lord, if Thou hadst been here my brother had not died" (S. John xi. 21). And at that wonderful moment when the order went forth, "Take ye away the stone" (S. John xi. 39), we feel the jarring word, "Lord, by this time he stinketh: for he hath been dead four days."

Last and greatest of all, Martha's faith stands out before us. We can realize Jesus' special love for Martha, and how she owned Him as Master, when we listen to her words, "*I know* that even now whatsoever Thou wilt ask of God, God will give it Thee." "I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day." "Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live. And whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die; believest thou this? She saith unto Him, Yea, Lord: I believe that Thou art the Christ, the Son of God, Which should come into the world" (S. John xi. 25-27). Blessed Martha! Like S. Peter, she witnessed a good confession, which flesh and blood did

not reveal to her, but the "Father Which is in Heaven" (S. Matt. xvi. 17).

How this living, active, true, spiritual life speaks to us. Think of our sloth. Think of the early Communions that we miss, those opportunities for receiving Christ. Have we any zeal for serving Christ, our Master? Can we say truly, "I know"? Have those inner eyes, the eyes of faith, seen anything, so that without hesitation we may say, "I know"? Do we really believe? When we speak of spiritual things, when we pray, when we say the Creed, are these things *real*? Are they sincere words? do they come from a true, loyal heart that Jesus could love? Would He find our homes a place where He could rest, and find fellowship and love? Should we receive Him into our house? What sort of language, of order, of courtesy would He find there?

Mary of Bethany.

*Read S. Luke x. 41, 42 ; S. John xi. 32-35 ; S. John xii. 3-8 ;
S. Matthew xxvi. 6-13.*



EACH time we read of Mary we find her at the feet of Jesus Christ—in her own home, we might say in the daily round of life, in the time of trouble and terrible sorrow, in the hour of joy and worship. What brought her there? Mary had proved, and really believed, “Severed from Me ye can do nothing” (S. John xv. 5). She understood what was meant by such words as “My soul hangeth upon God” (Psalm lxiii. 9), “My heart and my flesh cry out for the living God” (Psalm lxxxiv. 2), “Commit thy way unto the Lord,” or as we may read it, “Roll thy way upon God” (Psalm xxxvii. 5), “Cast thy burden upon the Lord” (Psalm lv. 22). She is a living example of “Rest in the Lord, wait patiently for Him”—literally, “being silent to God” (Psalm xxxvii. 7). Be yourself the prayer in His Presence.

But some people will say—What does it all mean? It sounds very beautiful, very exalted, but is there any meaning in it for our lives beyond feelings and emotion? How can we in this matter-of-fact nineteenth century sit at the Feet of Jesus? How can our souls hang upon God, and make a reality of the wonderful experiences you have quoted? I answer, It can be done. There are still souls who at their communions really come into the Presence of Jesus, nay more, really receive Him into their natures. The inner eyes of their souls really see Him. You say this is still only ecstatic feelings, and I tell you it is not feeling, but fact—no greater fact than a *change of nature*, so great a change that what once they loved they now shrink from and dread—that sin, that bad company, those filthy words, they *really pain them now*. What is this miracle? What is it but God's Divine nature touching their weak human nature, God's presence penetrating their souls? What is it but that they have really knelt at the Feet of their Master, and heard His words, have chosen the good part which shall not be taken away from them.

There are souls who know what it really means to pray. They could tell you they know the power of prayer. They have proved its mastery over their

passions. Anger, rage, revenge swell up in them, they have suffered a cruel wrong or insult, they have known what it means to go to the Feet of Jesus, to go to their room, or some place where they can be alone to kneel in prayer, and to pour out all the tumult that is oppressing them, to call to Him for help. They have known what it means to come out of that struggle with a calm, a peace, not of this world, a power to face the present that they cannot explain; it is not theirs, it has been given to them. Or they could tell you of some other time when a great difficulty faced them, when their courage burnt so low that to meet the difficulty, to act, seemed to them impossible. "I *cannot* do this," is what they said. But they prayed, they spread the difficulty before God, they asked directly for help and courage. The help *was* given, the courage was so strange they did not know themselves, they knew it was not themselves, but Christ living in them, acting in them.

It is for us to ask ourselves this afternoon—What about my prayers? Have I ever really prayed? Do I know of this supernatural life? Am I depending upon God? Do I gain His help, His strength? is it a reality to me? Have I ever so placed myself in His Presence that my whole nature

is a prayer before Him—my mind waiting for Him to speak, my heart waiting for Him to move, my lips waiting for Him to use, my hands, my feet, waiting for His errands? This is what “O rest in the Lord, wait patiently for Him” means. Our communions may mean this if, like Mary, we make our choice.

The Mothers who brought their Children to Jesus.

Read S. Matt. xix. 13-15; S. Mark x. 13-16; S. Luke xviii. 15-17.



TWO of these passages follow those words of our Lord which brought the marriage law back to its ideal in the Garden of Eden, when in the beginning God instituted marriage, and united man and woman by a bond that no man could put asunder. And it is good that this beautiful home story should follow: it comes to raise our minds to the ideal home. It answers those terrible questions of divorce, adultery. *The child*—who can dare say when they commit those sins that they are not sinning against their children, and instead of bringing them to Jesus to be blessed by Him, they bring them to disgrace and dishonour, with a drag upon their lives—the shame, the sin of their parents.

The subject this afternoon is Motherhood. 1. Its responsibility. 2. What it can do.

1. These mothers began to see what it meant to be a mother. This is what it means—but for me that life of another had never been. All that follows, all that is done by that life, is linked to my life. Job felt this in his terrible suffering (Job iii. 12, 13). David felt this in his time of repentance (Psalm li. 5). The woman in the crowd, when she looked upon the holy life of Jesus, recognized what a link that was to His mother's life (S. Luke xi. 27). Jesus acknowledged this link when He foresaw the sorrow coming upon His country (S. Luke xxiii. 28, 29). And yet many a silly, thoughtless girl will rush into marriage—perhaps but a child herself with a boy husband, both in their teens. No home ready, no money saved, no preparation, no more provision than the next week's wages, and those very likely uncertain. "We shall get along somehow; Jim must have a wife; I want to be my own mistress—it's much nicer than service." Pause and think of motherhood. Are you fit physically, or in character, to be a mother? Have you any right to drag into misery another life that had no voice in the matter? These mothers were true mothers, they *wanted good for their children*.

2. *What Motherhood can do.* A healthy, full-grown mother can give health to her child—a blessing for

life. A mother, through her character, can give great gifts, or terrible evils, to her child. But above all, when God gives you that little child, you can give it to Him. You can think, I love my child to have his mother's blessing, but I want, above all, for him the blessing of God. My arms now shelter him and hold him, but they are but a faint image of the sheltering arms of Jesus. Do you know, it is still all very real? Jesus is with His Church. He is with us "all the days." "Doubt ye not therefore, but earnestly believe that He will likewise favourably receive your child, that He will embrace him with the arms of His mercy, that He will give unto him the blessing of eternal life, and make him partaker of His everlasting kingdom." Yes, this is all that Baptism means—it is an extension of the day when those mothers brought their little children to Jesus, and He said, "Suffer the little children to come unto Me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of Heaven."

Salome, the Mother of S. James and S. John.

Read S. Matthew xx. 20-28. Cf. S. Mark i. 20 ; xv. 40 ; and S. Matthew xxvii. 56.

 HIS afternoon we think of the mother of two Apostles—the great Apostle S. John, and S. James, the first Apostle to drink of the cup of martyrdom. Who can say but what these two great saints gained something of their courage from their mother? Think of S. John, the human friend of Jesus, the Apostle of love—perhaps he had gained from his mother something of the courage that is born of love. He must have been much more than a yielding, pliable companion for Jesus to trust him with so great a friendship; he could lean with all the perfect trust of love upon the Breast of Jesus, the All Holy, the Word of Life.

As we look at Salome's request, and think (1) when it was made—just after a revelation of the coming Sacrifice and Death upon the Cross

(S. Matt. xx. 18, 19) ; (2) to Whom it was made—Salome asked it of the Lord from Heaven (verses 20, 21) ; (3) what the request was—a venture of faith and love, “Grant that these my two sons may sit one on Thy right hand and the other on the left in Thy Kingdom ”—we cannot but see great faith, great courage, great love, and great ambition.

This afternoon we will think specially of the last—*great ambition*. It always needs a balance of great humility. We do not know if this balance was in Salome’s character. It almost seems it was not, because Jesus said, “Ye know not what ye ask.” Great humility might have made her know. Jesus seems to see in her no thought, or doubt, as to the worthiness, the fitness of her two sons for such high places. Jesus does not blame her ambition, He, by one loving question, brings in the balance, “Are ye able?” (verse 22). And they—“like mother, like sons”—in all their daring of impetuous love, answered, “We are able.” Jesus saw the balance was not perfect, yet He did not wholly check their ardour (S. Matt. xii. 20)—“Ye shall indeed”—though all the while He knew that before “We are able” would be true both would forsake Him. Therefore He added, The gift you ask for your sons is not now to be given: it is a prepared gift for a

prepared people—people who have been proved by being servants, slaves, who have taken the lowest place (verses 23, 25-28).

And for ourselves, what do we learn? Is it right to have noble ambition, to wish for great things? to long to do great work, and be of great power? Is it right to wish this for ourselves, or, like Salome, to wish it for our relations? This is the question—Do we wish for the Cross? do we wish to suffer with Christ, to pass through the baptism that He was baptized with, to drink of His cup of suffering, to make ourselves of no reputation, to humble ourselves, to become obedient unto death? Have we this wish? And is it for others? Are we willing to be servants of all? That is the question to face. The Crown can only be reached by the way of the Cross.

The Widow who gave to the Treasury.

Read S. Mark xii. 41-44 ; S. Luke xxi. 1-4.

HE treasury—probably a chest to receive offerings to pay the expenses of keeping up the outward worship of the Temple, such as we read of in 2 Kings xii. 9.

Jesus sat and watched the givers. *He saw what it really cost them.* He saw a very costly gift put in—two mites, which make a farthing. That gift had cost the giver the whole of one day's wage—the whole of that day's living. It was as much as if a charwoman were to-day to give her two shillings towards the expenses of our Church. The widow's gift was born of want and toil, and it was given to the good God Who had not removed the want and toil, but had left them to bring forth such a beautiful, costly, glorious offering. The poor widow's costly gift is sending out bright rays of light still ; we, this afternoon, catch some gleams of its brilliance. It

shines on, though the Temple, and the gold and precious stones that adorned it, are lost and buried, dimmed with earth's dust. It tells of a true heart, keeping true to God, loving Him, and all that was His, in spite of widowhood, toil, penury.

And for ourselves. What is giving to God? What does giving mean—true giving? This is what it means—generosity. “Neither will I offer to the Lord that which costs me nothing.” Another word for giving is sacrifice (2 Sam. xxiv. 24). Sacrifice springs from love. We do not ask in great surprise why a mother sacrifices her rest and health to watch by her sick child: we cannot think of a mother's love apart from the sacrifice. So we do not ask why we should give to God. If we love Him, even faintly, we shall understand the why. David understood why, when that water which was bought with the price of sacrifice was brought to him from the well at Bethlehem. He felt in his inmost self he did not merit such a sacrifice, He must give it back to God (2 Sam. xxiii. 15, 16). But though we need not ask, Why should we? we may ask, What can we give to God? This poor widow teaches us. We can give that which has cost us something to get, or which we can ill spare. She had laboured for her mites, and

she needed them at home. Yes, you say, I can understand that a poor person can really give, but what about the rich? Ah! the rich! You have thought of one of the troubles of riches. It is so easy to cast in of our abundance, so difficult to reach the point of really giving. But we must not be narrow-minded, and think giving money is the only giving, that money is the only thing we can toil for and earn to give. *Our whole life* can be a giving. S. Paul found this out; he spoke of gladly spending himself and being spent (2 Cor. xii. 15), and such giving comes after toil, after labour; and often when the time of giving comes we feel, as this poor widow must have felt, how scanty the store! Influence — strength — comfort — would we have these to cast into God's treasury—His world? Well, we must win them first. *Influence*. It means that the soul must persevere in striving after God, neglecting none of the ways He has shown to it for reaching Him. It means really *being* what we would have others be. *Strength*. It means being brave ourselves, facing our own difficulties. It means conquering our bad habits in God's Strength. It means victory won by faith. *Comfort*. It means the dark road of suffering, it means pain, it often means anguish of soul, like Christ to suffer

being tempted, in order to succour them that are tempted. And how can such costly treasures be won for God's treasury? "My Grace is sufficient for thee. My Strength is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor. xii. 9).

Pilate's Wife.

Read S. Matthew xxvii. 19.



T. JOHN, S. Peter, Nicodemus, and doubtless many another friend of Jesus Christ, were present during the hours of His trial, and yet no voice of a friend is heard to give testimony or to refute the evil witnessed against Him. No, there was none to uphold (Isa. lxiii. 5). Jesus could say (Psalm cxlii. 5), "No man cared for My life." But let us never forget that at this hour of trial, when no friend stood by Him, then a stranger, a woman, a Roman lady, a heathen, spoke for Him. Probably she had never known Jesus Christ, had never heard the gracious words that proceeded out of His mouth. She was not afraid to give her testimony, and to say quite plainly what she believed, "That Just Man." She was quite true to her convictions. It mattered not to her what others might be saying of Him. She did not stop to find out the general impression about Him in her world, she did

not try to feel the tone and then form her message to suit that tone. God had convinced her by her dream, and she kept true to her conviction, she was not double-minded.

And for ourselves. Has God never revealed anything to our souls? Have there never been times in our lives, perhaps in the quiet at night, when something has spoken within us—yes, and made us suffer until we would listen—a voice that has said very plainly, Have thou nothing to do with that plan, that judgment, it is wrong; go not in the way of that evil? Or the voice may have said, “Speak out, stand by that righteous cause, say plainly, it is just, whatever others may say.” Have there never been times in your life when you have seen quite clear and plain the mind of God, the right thing to be said or done? Has not some truth of our religion suddenly come to you as a beautiful revelation, and you have known it to be true? What are you doing with these convictions? Are you turning them into action? Never through all eternity will this Roman lady’s conviction be lost or unfruitful, for it lives in the fact that she spoke for Jesus Christ, that her mouth framed the confession, “This Just Man.” Is this what we are doing with our convictions? Will our lives be beautiful because they are the facts

written for all time by true and beautiful convictions? or are we trying to fit our convictions to be in harmony with the tone of our little world? Are we saying—Everybody says so-and-so, and though I know how false it is, I will just be quiet, or I will say something about “faults on both sides”? Are we saying—Everybody makes fun of that girl, though I happen to know she has done a noble thing, I shall be laughed at too if I speak up for her, and say she is just and true; I had better leave it alone, or, if it gets very bad, try and divert their attention? Are we saying—It is not the fashion now to believe in religion; though I know something of the Life of God working in my life, it would be bad taste, when people are making fun of the Church Services and mocking at religion, to say out boldly, Do you know you are laughing at what is to me the greatest reality of my life, I should be a liar to laugh too? Or do you weakly smile, and try not to listen? Some day, Pilate's wife, heathen though she was, will rise in the day of judgment and condemn many a baptized person (S. Matt. xii. 41). For she *was true* to her convictions.

Mary of Magdala.

Read S. Luke viii. 2.



TO-DAY we think of her past—evil spirits had been in her—seven devils. She had given them room, they stayed with her. Evil passions—what a hold they take upon a soul (1 S. John ii. 16). They are like a terrible force, that cannot be withheld; they create a deadly thirst, that cannot satisfy itself. Passion indulged—what does it work? Refreshment? Rest? Satisfaction? Peace? No—feverish desire; hopeless anxiety; constant need; misery; this is the true answer. Jesus knew it was true. He knew that the woman by the well had been indulging her passions, that she needed something that would quench her thirst (S. John iv. 14, 15). Jesus, that day when He looked upon Mary of Magdala, knew. And something in that look, some mighty power of the influence of purity, brought Mary to cast herself upon the Lord. She brought herself—that weak-

willed, almost shattered self, mastered by the power of evil spirits. And God was ready to heal. He rebuked those surging storms of evil that rose within her, and made them cease. There was a great calm.

And for ourselves. *That Power is with us still.* Do you know that worrying spirit that rises within you, that makes you want to worry others, and make them cross and discontented, and give you an opportunity to have an evil temper, "a regular row," as neighbours say? Need you give way to it? Must you let it spread and spread until your day is all clouds and storms? Is there a Power to cast it out? Yes. Go with that evil spirit just as you are, and pray, throw yourself upon the power of God, ask in simple words for His help; it will be given you. There will be a great calm; the wild waves will be hushed. *It is perfectly true; prove it by trying it.*

Do you know that unclean spirit that almost fascinates your mind, that makes you want to look at, or read, or hear, what is lustful and impure, that urges you to talk to others and spread the evil influence further? Is there a power to cast it out? Yes. Only come with that evil nature into God's Holy Presence, and stronger than all the power of uncleanness, unholiness, will come the power, the

love of Goodness. It is such a beautiful thing, such a joyous thing. *It must master*, if we will only come into its presence. Do you know that vain, selfish, self-seeking spirit? It creeps in everywhere, nothing is free from it, not even our religion. If another is praised—"I do not get praised, or loved"; "I am not loved like that." Yes, all intercourse, all naturalness marred and spoilt by this evil spirit of vanity. The power of God can make us crush that self-seeking spirit. It can go quite away if we will but come by prayer into His presence, and ask His help. We shall learn what is the "expulsive power of a new affection"; our hearts will be cleansed by the inspiration of Christ's Holy Spirit.

This is our lesson to-day. Like Mary of Magdala, we may learn and understand all that these words mean, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Restore unto me the joy of Thy Salvation, uphold me with Thy free Spirit" (Psalm li. 10-12).

Mary Magdalene and the Resurrection.

Read S. John xx. 1-18.



WHY—may we enquire—Why was Mary the first to see the Risen Christ? Was it because she loved the most? We cannot say this when we think of the Blessed Virgin, or S. John. Was it because she had sinned most? No; God does not reward sin. 1. She knew the need of Christ most. 2. She kept the closest to what was His. 3. She had had a foretaste of the power of His Resurrection within herself, and so she was ready to grasp the meaning of the Resurrection of the Body.

1. Her weak human nature had found what alone could make her strong—The presence of God upon earth. And then that presence was withdrawn from sight. She was present at the Cross of Jesus (chap. xix. 25). She saw the burial of the outward sign of that presence (S. Mark xv. 47). She felt within herself the need of God, her soul was athirst for

God, many voices without and within cried out, "Where is now thy God?" (Psalm xlii. 2, 3).

That need of God must come to every soul. To some who have let its voice speak, and be heard above the other needs of their nature, and have fed and sustained it, it becomes their daily, hourly need; their present and their future life hang upon God; they really know what it means, "To me to live is Christ." Others will not recognize their need of God until perhaps the hour of death. Do we feel it now? Take heart, learn from Mary that Jesus is standing near, though we know it not.

2. Mary did the best thing with her longings. She kept near to all that belonged to Christ—His Cross, His followers, His Sepulchre, His Body. She was the most persevering; the dark early morning, the stone before the door, the soldiers did not baffle her; others went away, she lingered on (verses 10, 11). She drew nigh to God.

This speaks to us. Can we keep near to things that belong to Christ? Yes. His Sacraments, His followers, His written letter—the Bible—these are means through which we may draw nigh to God. What effort do we make? Does the early morning find us at His Blessed Sacrament? "Draw nigh to God, and He will draw nigh to you."

Mary knew not at first of her great happiness. She looked into the dark tomb. She could not see her Lord standing behind her in the early morning light of that first Easter Day. She looked into the cold, dark tomb, as you and I might have looked, and then she turned and looked into the Face of "the Living One." Her eyes were filled with the darkness, they were not ready for the Light: "She supposed Him to have been the gardener."

O patient Love of God, and dim-eyed love of man, how can you meet? It is the voice of God that wakes the dead, the soul sleeping for sorrow, "Mary." "He calleth His own sheep by name, and they know His voice." The answer comes, "My Master."

All lessons were not learnt, her love was not yet perfected, she wanted to feel with a bodily sense His Blessed Presence. Jesus taught her in those words, "Touch me not" ("keep not clinging to Me"), that the trustfulness of love comes from the highest part of our nature, that we hold our closest union in our hearts. And so it is with all the purest love.

And yet another lesson comes to Mary. "Go," not stay in delight and ecstasy, but "Go" now, without delay; "Go, tell My brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto My Father and your Father; and to My God and your God."

Sapphira, "Beautiful."

Read Acts iv. 32-37 ; v. 1-11.

HOW beautiful was the life of those first Christians. Here was a glimpse of the beauty of holiness (Psalm xxix. 2), of the atmosphere of Heaven (chap. iv. 32). "And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul : neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own ; but they had all things common." Notice, it was not that no one had any possessions—gifts, treasures, heir-looms ; but his possessions were for all, to be shared by others. The first Adam placed in the beautiful Garden of Eden, his realm—this brings to me a glimpse of the loveliness of Heaven as a Place. The Second Adam, the Lord from Heaven, living in His Church, His Kingdom, His Realm—reveals to us in the life of the Early Church the beauty of Heaven as a State. Love is that perfect state.

But why should we speak of Heaven, or think of Heaven? Is it because we had better ignore earth altogether, and get through the time here as quickly as possible? No, Heaven is God's Ideal for earth. It is the measure of the Will of God for earth—"Thy Will be done on earth as it is in Heaven."

And as sin crept in and marred the beauty and perfection of the Garden of Eden (Gen. iii. 8), so again sin, the sin of selfishness, crept in and brought the first discord into the beautiful Kingdom of Heaven on earth—Christ's Kingdom, His Church. And as in the first case, so in the second, there was a woman, as well as a man, in this terrible work.

Sapphira—it means beautiful. How unlike her name her life became! Think of that ugly lie, and all the horror that followed upon it. Think of the inner workings of her spirit. Think of its selfish aims, wanting to say something that she possessed *was her own* to hoard, to hide, to keep back. Think of the vanity, which is another form of selfishness, wanting to make an effect, to appear well in the eyes of her little set, to act a lie before she spoke a lie, to pretend to be acting under the influence of the Spirit of her God, to seem to have His influence at work, making her "of one heart and one soul with the multitude of them that believed," so

that she could no longer keep the land. How true were those searching words, said of her husband and therefore of herself, "Thou hast lied unto God." She seemed to be bearing the fruit of His Spirit—Love—but really she was full of selfish lust, "which conceived and brought forth sin, and sin, when it was finished, brought forth death." "Then fell she down straightway at his feet and yielded up the ghost."

Sordid selfishness—look at it at work in God's beautiful world. Where is the sign of the Kingdom of Heaven upon earth? Why even much of our so-called charity is often full of vain show. That terrible birth of selfishness, born so early in the midst of the Kingdom, those tares so soon sown amongst the good seed by the enemy—how have they not ripened and seeded again? Where now can we find that "one heart and one soul," so that to have all things common is the most natural thing (for remember the possessor and the sharer were of *one heart*)? It was not all pity and compassion on one side and a greedy grasping of "rights" on the other, neither was it only great or valuable things belonging to the rich that were shared by the poor, but the poor man's millstone was ready to be shared quite as much as the rich

man's divan. Both were of one heart about this question of possessions. *Love*—what can it not work? Can it not touch with glory the most common service? Can it not deal successfully with the most difficult, the most painful, the most involved positions of man with man? Ah, Love has "rights" indeed! a right to help, a right to receive in the most natural way possible, when man and his fellow-man are of "one heart and one soul."

And for ourselves? Do we ask—How can I help to bring back the beautiful state of Christ's Kingdom, so that in deed and in truth God's Will may be done on earth as it is in Heaven? The answer is—Do you know what it means to love? Take 1 Cor. xiii., and read it through. Ask—Is this true of me? Do I suffer long? am I kind? When I think of my fellow-servant, the girl under me, the woman who stands next me in the laundry, my neighbour, my fellow-class girls, my own relations—what about bearing all things, hoping all things, never failing? O priceless gift, the gift of love! Really loving—not only the friend who is just what I like, who understands me as no one else does, but that tiresome relation, that disagreeable girl. The more I think about love, I see how certain it must be that "Love is of God," that the first fruit of God's

Spirit in any nature is love, and that God *is* Love.

"Unseen, Unheard, Unknown,
How shall we learn of Thee,
Thy Being prove?
Love witnesseth alone
To human hearts that only live by love."

Dorcas, the Worker.

Read Acts ix. 36-43.



HE is called a disciple, which means "following to learn." Whom did she follow? Christ. Listen to what could be said of her—"she was full of good works and alms-deeds which she did." How near she must have kept "to the Blessed steps of His most Holy Life," "Who went about doing good" (Acts x. 38). Her life was a life of work—service. She *worked*, did not pay others to work ("Alms-deeds which she did").

This, then, is our first lesson. Have I done any alms at all. Do I need to be rich to do them? Is it the greater giving to the less? *No*. Alms-doing means—"By Love serve one another." I do not know whether Dorcas had given those coats and garments; God tells us *she had made them* (verse 39). How great this is! Why, my whole life might be alms-doing. All work done to serve another may be made a great gift to God.

The next thought we learn from Dorcas, is that love begets love. Her work was no *business* that must be got through, but a life of love lived amongst her own people. Gradually she stretched out her heart to hold more and more friends, with joy she yielded more and more service, so that when God called her away the grief was so great, the need of herso terrible, that God put upon her the great honour of giving her another piece of road to travel with her fellow-travellers. Was it because her path lay so near to her Teacher's path that she came back once again to walk along it and mark the way? I think so. I am quite sure it was for the sake of others that she lived again.

And for ourselves—What of our lives? Is Love the atmosphere around us? Are we marking out the only true path of life that God has shewn to all in Jesus' Life—the Life of Love? Are we disciples “following to learn”? “By love serve one another” (Gal. v. 13); “For ye serve the Lord Christ” (Col. iii. 24).

“This perhaps is Love—
To have our hands too full of gifts to give
For holding out a hand to take a gift.”

Lydia, the Woman of Business.

Read Acts xvi. 13-15, 40.



MERCHANT woman who worshipped God—this tells us Lydia's character.

Think how easy for her to worship gold ; how easy for her to worship success, luxury, pomp and show ; how easy for her to worship sharp practice, cunning, looking out for the main chance.

And what if she had ? Would the love of gold open her heart ? Would the love of worldly prosperity open her heart ? No, these things help to narrow the heart (1 S. John ii. 15-17). They would make her look on her own things (Phil. ii. 4).

“ Whose heart the Lord opened.” Have you seen a flower open in the beautiful sun rays ? Open—what for ? To send out its fragrance, to bring the busy insects to find honey, and make it some day bear fruit, and work some good in the world. The sun opened the flower, because the flower lifted itself up in the sun's rays—stood where the sun could shine

upon it. Lydia's heart was a most beautiful thing ; God had made it to be opened. Lydia came Sunday by Sunday, and we doubt not day by day, into the sunlight, into God's Presence. She worshipped God. What wonder that the light of God should one day unfold the many shrinking, folded powers of her nature, and one happy day her woman's heart was opened—open to receive as the flowers receive (she attended to the things spoken, she was baptized)—open to give out, as the flowers give out their fragrance and their beauty. She brought the light first to her household, then to outsiders (verses 15, 40).

And for ourselves. What—whom—do we worship? Is it money-making? Is it making a show, and taking the shine out of other people? Is it pleasure? Is it work? Is it ourselves? Is it God?

What about our hearts? That beautiful thing, a woman's heart, wherein is folded up the power of mother-love, the power of loving as a wife. The power of loving all around us—the sickly, the weak, the puny, the wayward, the unhappy, the lonely, the dying. In young hearts these things are folded up. There is only one thing that will unfold them one by one, and give a meaning and a beauty to each—it is the Love of God. Has His great Love

been allowed to stream upon us? Do we go where we know It is shining? Do we ever place ourselves under Its full sunshine? It is always shining on all the world, but some prefer to live in the dark, or to make artificial light for themselves. Only come with your trade, your pleasure, your hard work, and worship God, as Lydia did. We shall never love anyone rightly until we love God. It is that Love that really opens *all* the heart. Sometimes, when we love someone very much, it seems to open our hearts a little wider, and for a time we seem to love everybody more. But no, it does not last, we soon settle down into half-opened hearts. The Love of God, and for God, never ceases until each part of our nature is opened and developed, and that is the work of Eternity. It is the most difficult thing in the world to really love (see 1 Cor. xiii.).

Priscilla, the Wife of a Tentmaker.

Read Acts xviii. 2, 3.



THE friend of S. Paul (xviii. 13). What did this mean to her? Think. S. Paul, a highly-educated man, who had mixed with the world of intellect (Acts xxii. 3); S. Paul, a man of strong convictions and determination of character—no apathy in him (chap. ix. 3-20); S. Paul—one to whom Christ had revealed Himself, one who had held conversation with Him, and had spoken in answer to that Heavenly Voice (chap. ix. 4, 5); one whom God had chosen and had put special honours upon (1 Cor. xi. 23)—with this man Priscilla and her husband lived. She it was who waited upon and served this great-hearted servant of God. She and her husband kept with S. Paul.

Slowly there must have streamed into her life such bright new light—new light on things of Heaven and upon all earthly things. The light of S. Paul's example shone before men; she lived in that

light. What glory she must have seen revealed! The power of a blessed holy friendship catching the fire of God—this was the privilege God gave to Priscilla.

And was this great good that came to Priscilla's life fulfilled and complete? No; it came to her to be passed on by her, so that we find the friend of S. Paul able when the time came "to take and explain" to a learned man "the way of God more perfectly." In the revised version, Priscilla's name stands first in this good work (Acts xviii. 26). And so the bright light streamed on. The humble house-mother freely gave of what she had received; and though she could not have eloquence—nor was it her work to speak publicly "and mightily convince the Jews"—yet she, by sharing what she had received from God in His gift to her of the friendship of S. Paul, she was the means by which the light of the knowledge of God spread to many of her fellow-countrymen through the teaching of Apollos (Acts xviii. 28).

Our lesson. What about our friendships—have they brought us any wealth to share with others? Do we wish others to share in the happiness they have brought to us? Do we try to draw others into the influence that has brought health and joy to our lives? Have we anything worth the sharing in our

friendships? What do they bring to us? Are they at all like the friendship we have thought of to-day?

The lesson of sharing. Have I got anything I could share? What do I know of "the way of God"? Could I pass on anything about Him to another? to a little child? to a friend? Have I got anything I could share? What do I know of the way of a true woman's life? Could I share and pass on to another my standard of what a woman should be like in God's world? To a girl younger than myself—what have I to pass on if she should look to me? Or to a young man who is looking to me to fix his standard of what a woman should be? What do I know of the way of knowledge? What thoughts have I in my mind that would be worth passing on? What books and papers do I read? are they worth sharing? And then the many countless gifts of God—my voice, my youth, my possessions, my gift of fun, of beauty perhaps, my home. Every good gift is from God. Do I prize them? Do I try to share them? This is God-like. This is to do God's Will on earth as it is in Heaven.

"He only who forgets to hoard has learned to live."

Lois and Eunice, the Women who handed on their Religion.

Read Acts xvi. 1 ; 2 Timothy i. 5 ; iii. 15.



UNFEIGNED faith dwelt in Lois, unfeigned faith dwelt in Eunice, and unfeigned faith dwelt in the Bishop of Ephesus—Timothy.

What does this mean? What was their faith, their belief? It meant real belief in God, not an assumed belief, saying they believed because everyone they knew believed. It meant real conviction, being quite sure of things not seen, of what God had revealed to their fathers, what they could hear and read for themselves, in the Old Testament. They would read there of the law of worship. Their faith would show them of its meaning, by faith they saw the promises wrapt up in that worship—the Incarnation. All this was a part of Lois' life, it really lived with her life and guided it. It did not come and go, but dwelt with her. This faith was such a real thing to her that she was bound to

influence her child, to pass it on to her. How keen children are to see the real and the unreal. "Is it really true, quite true?" How good to hear the eager, childish voice say this. "Yes," Lois would answer, "quite true; the Messiah is coming some day," and Eunice would look into her mother's face and read the truth there. She would see a look as true as when her mother told her not to play with fire—that fire burns. She would see the really happy look, the pure unfeigned joy, when her mother told her again and again the good news of Holy Scripture, which was making her so wise as to what Salvation really meant (1 Tim. iii. 15). And so the unfeigned faith entered into Eunice's life. It came through the door of loving trust in her mother. Lois handed on her religion with her motherhood. And then another mother, another child, a son—what might he not become? Through the same door that faith had entered into Eunice's life, through that same door it entered into the life of Timothy, the first Bishop of Ephesus. He had learnt to trust his mother; he had seen "unfeigned faith."

And for ourselves. Two lessons come to us.
1. What do I know of unfeigned faith? 2. Do I hand on my religion—is it the great reality of my life?

1. Have I any faith that I dare stand by? Do I really believe the Creed? Is it nothing to me when I hear people making fun, or parodies, of the Faith? Do I shrink with any pain from hearing suggestions that take away from the honour, the dignity of the Faith?

2. Before all other of our good things that we should share and pass on, our religion, our Faith stands first; for only religion can really change man's nature. We might give the best surroundings, and a man who had a strong animal nature would not be changed. But let his nature be changed—let a stronger force than his own inclinations come into him, and he himself will try and no longer live an animal life. This is the work of unfeigned Faith. Do I hand on my religion? What is my influence upon childhood? Does it find something really true in me? What do I hand on to the girls younger than myself—in the street where I live? What shall I hand on as a mother?

Phœbe, the Deaconess.

Read Romans xvi. 1, 2, and paragraph at the end of the letter.



PHŒBE—the forerunner of a long line of workers—Phœbe, means shining. Her example is still shining. Deaconess means Servant.

She was a servant in that beautiful household of God, that Divine Family, where there is room for all. Yes, there is a place in God's family that only you can fill, an individual place. This is the great truth that Phœbe learnt—She was no longer alone.

Probably she was a lone woman. She may have been single, more probably a widow. She had time to spare. She had a woman's heart to spare; a woman's power of tact and usefulness to spare. There came a time in her life when the thought came—as it must come to us all—*Why am I in the world?* She evidently had few home ties, for she could be sent from Greece to Rome. Was I born

only to keep my house tidy? only to mend my clothes? I feel in me greater powers than these. I could love, if anybody claimed my love? I could serve, if anybody needed my service? Yes, mother-love is in my heart with all its power of service. But I am a lone woman. Why am I in the world?

Phœbe means shining; let us catch the light that she caught. "Our Sister"—this is not loneliness; a sister to the great Apostle S. Paul! "A servant," or "deaconess," to the Church where she lived—Cenchrea (near Corinth). Why, now, a mother's care for her own family is small in comparison to the large-hearted care of Phœbe for that portion of the family of God that she was serving day by day in Greece. The family grows perhaps year by year, and as the new little brother or sister comes the mother's love reaches out to the newborn child; but Phœbe learned to love new souls, new relatives, almost day by day. God tells us she was "a succourer of many."

And for ourselves. Do we know this joy of service? How do we think upon the Church—the Household of God? Do we care to know of this great family life? Are we willing to give unpaid service to our fellow brothers and sisters, first through the home,

and then out into the world? Can it be said of us—a “succourer of many”? God has given unpaid service for us; we can buy His gifts without money (Isa. lv. 1). “Freely we have received, freely give” (S. Matt. x. 8).

The Annunciation—Mary of Nazareth.

Read S. Luke i. 26-38.

GOD'S time had come. The Priests, were they ready? The leaders of religion, were they ready? Jerusalem, was it ready? The kings of the earth and rulers taking counsel together, were they ready? Were they ready for the Anointed—God Incarnate?

In a lowly house, in a lowly village, a lowly village girl was ready. God, looking on all the world, from eternity to eternity, saw one heart ready, one "vessel meet for the Master's use," one selfless soul. Yes, the Annunciation, when it comes before us, teaches us the lesson of preparation. Read it again. There is no excitement, no woman's feeble fussing, no hurried speaking, or self-consciousness. Instead, we find a mind that has reasoned before, so it can reason now. "She was troubled at his saying, and cast in her mind"—she waited to hear more. The full Message came. The reasoning mind still worked,

she would understand—she asks simply and purely, “How can these things be, seeing I know not a man?” This was not want of faith, it was a mind ready to be taught, and God would have her learn (verse 35). Mary’s mind was a mind ready for God to teach. Her body was ready. Let us not forget this. She could face an Archangel and declare her virginity. Think of her childhood; it was blameless. God the Son was born of a pure Virgin. But above all, her heart, her spirit were ready. Once let her grasp that it was the *Will of God she was to fulfil*, then no other reason, circumstance, difficulty came before her. “Behold the handmaid of the Lord : be it unto me according to thy word.”

And for ourselves. What is the great teaching we may learn from Mary at the Annunciation? *That a soul can be ready for God.* What made her ready? Can I tell you? Yes, Mary had been God’s handmaid long before. There was no doubt about it. The Archangel did not shrink from owning it. Mary could proclaim it: “Behold the handmaid of the Lord.”

What does this mean? It means the very opposite of sin. Sin is going against the known will of God, not being His servant. Holiness does not mean only praying or reading our Bibles, but just

always listening to the voice of God, and doing His will. Think how this comes into everything—our games; that rough, rude manner; that loud, coarse laughing; those ugly signs and vulgar expressions. Our minds—those selfish day-dreams; those remembered and much-read unclean books and newspapers. Our bodies—those untidy, dirty ways; those lazy habits; those unmended clothes. Our hearts—those grumbling murmurs; those first budding passions; those wild desires. The Will of God, does *that* rule? Ask God to rule. Tell Him, “O God, my heart is ready, my heart is ready.” Let Him take up your nature and use it in His service. There is no calm, no rest, but in God. This only makes us ready.

An Angel will come to us one day to summon us into another life. O that He may find us ready. Shall we be able to say then, “Be it unto me according to Thy word.”

Do you know Christ has said that anyone doing God’s will can be as His Mother? (S. Matt. xii. 50).

The Blessed Virgin, "The Mother of my Lord."

Read S. Luke i. 39-56.

"REAT is the mystery of Godliness." "God manifest in the flesh." "Furthermore, it is necessary that we believe rightly the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ. For the right Faith is, that we believe and confess, that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is God and Man," etc. "When Thou tookest upon Thee to deliver man, Thou didst not abhor the Virgin's womb."

May we think rightly on this great subject, for it is the essence of our Religion. It is nothing less than the Creator becoming a part of His creation. Without it, mankind has come to an awful standstill. There is nothing beyond. Man, strive as he will, cannot give another man a higher nature than he has himself. Man, the high watermark of created things, look at him, and see him in his entirety;

look well, thoughtfully. See all the struggle for life that has gone before him; and as you look at a great city, full, ah! how full of human life, ask yourself—Was it worth while for the lower life of Creation to have struggled up and up through suffering to this, if this is really all? In other words, would it not have been better for Nature to have stopped at birds, in their happy pure existence, than to have climbed up to that poor drunkard, that girl on the streets? Yes, a thousand times yes, if we could never say, “When Thou tookest upon Thee” (Thou God Jehovah) “to deliver man”—the drunkard and the harlot—“Thou didst not abhor the Virgin’s womb.”

Let us never be afraid, then, to think of this “good news” in its most truly literal light. It was quite true. The high and Holy One, Who inhabits all space, really dwelt for nine months in the body of a simple village girl. There is nothing repulsive about that part of our nature as God made it. It is all most beautifully planned and built with His Mind in it. He felt there was nothing to “abhor” in dwelling there. It is in the unclean mind, and passions, that impurity lies.

But you will say—It was indeed a wonderful blessing to Mary that God should become united

to her nature. No wonder she sang that hymn—
“My soul doth magnify the Lord.” I can see her nature was raised, raised above all natural laws; but what has that to do with *me* and my poor weak woman’s nature? How does it touch those poor outcasts you have mentioned, living now, 1,900 years after? How? Do we not say—What has been, can be? It is of the unknown alone that we cannot speak with certainty. God has touched human nature—and God can touch it still. Yes, and now, not God alone, but the God-Man, the Christ, wills to touch human nature—mine, yours—to give me and you a boundless outlook. We can understand Creation now. It came from God, to work back to God.

But you will say—How can these things be? Christ stooped to receive of us His Flesh, now He, in another mystery, gives back to us His Flesh and Blood. He took poor weak human flesh and blood at the Incarnation, He partook of our humanity (Heb. ii. 14). Now, in the same way, at the Blessed Sacrament, He takes poor weak creatures of bread and wine and gives Himself to us, that we may partake of His Divinity, and of His fulness we may all receive. This is the greatest answer to your question. The Holy Communion is an extension of the Incarnation.

The After-life of the Blessed Virgin Mary :

(I) The Visit of the Shepherds.

Read S. Luke ii. 1-19.

E have learned deep thoughts about the Incarnation. To-day we will gather up all we may learn of Mary in her after-life.

The one thing God has revealed to us is the *depth* of her nature. Have you ever thought how few and chosen are her words? How silent is her life? The Angels fill earth and Heaven with song. Mary does not tell out her great secret, she is willing to pass as a poor traveller, and take shelter where she can find it. The shepherds come with their wonderful story. They find the calm home where Jesus is. Mary has no excited tale to tell of her exceeding great revelations. No, her voice is not heard. Is she apathetic? is she in a trance? a dream? No, her inward life is revealed to us—"But Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart" (verse 19). One day three Easterns, in their gorgeous clothing and pomp

and retinue, come before the Child and His Mother. They fall down and worship Him. They spread their costly gifts at His feet. There is silence still—a holy silence (S. Matt. ii. 11). Then comes the flight into a strange country, going by night. We hear of no complaints, but ready obedience. Then, many days after, the Mother and Child are brought into God's House. The Child is Redeemed. The Mother in silence received another revelation—the revelation of suffering before joy (S. Luke ii. 34, 35). Twelve years have passed. Mary is not changed. The calm of God is all around her still. She speaks. It is the same true nature, longing to understand God's way. It is the first sorrow. Why, she asks, have we sorrowed? (S. Luke ii. 48). The answer comes. It is in fact the same truth that she grasped at the Annunciation: "My Father's business"—God's Will. She could not understand this answer, but it all sufficed her; no more questions need be asked, in silence she treasured the word. "But His Mother kept all these sayings and pondered them in her heart" (S. Luke ii. 51).

Our hearts, have we any storage there? Our hearts, are they "light come, light go"? Do we ever keep them with any diligence at all? Do we always talk out what we feel? If any great gift, or

thought, or love, has come into our lives, do we ever spoil it all by talking the good out of it? Can we ever be true at our heart's core to what we love? God, His dealings with us, that still small voice within, are we calmly listening to and pondering these things in our hearts? His voice, do we know it? Is there no room for Him? Are our hearts like that busy inn? must He stay without? Are we true to those we love? do we store our hearts with thoughts of them? do we keep there faithfully words they may have said, or facts about them they would have us keep quite sacred? Such a heart is pure; it is ready for God and man (S. Matt. v. 8).

The After-life of the Blessed Virgin Mary (2).

Read S. John ii. 1-17; xix. 25-27; Acts i. 14.



WE have come to the last Sunday of the year and the last lesson of our course. The subject to-day is the closing years of the Blessed Virgin.

We have chosen three passages for our study, which are so full of teaching that we can but choose one prominent lesson from each of them.

From the history of the Marriage at Cana, let us gather the lesson of bright, ready obedience. "Whatsoever He saith unto you, do it." Have you ever thought that these are the only recorded words of Mary, as addressed to the outside world. They were said, we know, to servants who waited upon Christ and His friends. What a message these words are for all time. She who knew Christ best, she, the most honoured of mankind, addressed to the world this command, "Whatsoever He saith

unto you, do it." It is spoken to you and to me to-day, it is Mary's message to us. She has a right so to speak to us, for she really obeyed Christ's commands.

Do you want me to tell you of some of Christ's commands? We know some of them so well. How plain the words, "This do in remembrance of Me." There are commands of Christ that I cannot tell you; *you* only know of them—the commands of your conscience. Only take heed that whatsoever He saith unto you, you do it.

Then, when we read the second passage, what is it that we may learn? It is the calmness of Mary's sorrow as she stood by the Cross. "Now there stood by the Cross of Jesus, His Mother." What reverent dignity there is in her silence, and in her attitude. We must not presume to place our griefs on a level with her grief, for we cannot now understand it. Remember, in that Death, there was the severing of the most perfect human intercourse time has ever known. And yet Mary *stood*; she stood by the Cross of Jesus. Was it only for her own comfort that she stood there? May we not think of the refreshment and balm it must have been to the Heart of Jesus to know that she could stand beside Him, beneath His Cross? But He Who refused the

wine mingled with myrrh, which would have lulled His physical sufferings, also put away from Him the comfort of His Mother's presence. And she—how perfect her obedience—she left Him that very hour, alone. Had she grasped the purpose of His sufferings? Not one dreg of that cup of suffering His Father gave to Him would He leave untasted, not even the state of utter loneliness, of suffering alone.

Though we cannot share with Mary her peculiar grief, yet from her we may learn how to bear our sufferings. Never to fly from them, but to bravely face them ; never to leave them until God bids us.

Very significant is the teaching of the last recorded act of Mary upon earth, not in the sorrow of the Cross, but in the glory of the Resurrection she is waiting upon God in the fellowship of His Church. Shall we not be content to leave Mary there? It is where the inspired Word of God leaves her.

Think, too, of your place in the Household of God ; you too can find fellowship, you too can wait upon God in His Church. Do you share her prayers? her expectations? The divine power of her Sacraments? Do you pray for the family of God? Need we fear the future, need we fear partings, if we have this fellowship one with another?

And now to gather up the work of these studies.

We have learnt many a lesson from a long line of holy women of old, many a lesson from the ruined lives of sinful women. In the Old Testament, the ideal of womanhood rose to a climax in the woman pictured in Prov. xxxi. Then, standing between the Old and the New Testament came Elizabeth and Anna. They lead us to the threshold of a higher revelation of womanhood—the Blessed Virgin Mary. With this ideal we close. There is no doubt but that the ideal of the virtuous woman in the Proverbs was fulfilled in Mary. We cannot doubt that the heart of S. Joseph could safely trust in her who could keep the “secret things that belong to the Most High,” and “ponder them in her heart.” We cannot doubt the diligence of those hands which clothed and fed and comforted the One, in Whom her spirit rejoiced as “God, my Saviour.” We cannot doubt the cleanliness and spotless order of that house where Jesus deigned to dwell. We cannot doubt of the perfect wisdom of her charity who took a part in the training of the Redeemer of the world. Neither can we doubt of the quiet wisdom of her tongue, when at that stupendous moment of her life she was able to say, “Behold the handmaid of the Lord : be it unto me according to thy word.” Indeed, Mary was “a

woman that feared the Lord," "all nations called her blessed." All this was true of Mary as it was of the woman whose price was above rubies. This was true, and much more beyond this. Can I tell you of it? It is found in the words, "Your life is hid with Christ in God." "Ye have the mind of Christ."

Shall we especially pray for ourselves the Collect of the Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin Mary? "We beseech thee, O Lord, pour Thy grace into our hearts; that like as we have known the Incarnation of Thy Son Jesus Christ by the message of an Angel, so by His Cross and Passion we may be brought unto the glory of His Resurrection; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen."

THE END.

